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# THE LEADEN CASKET

*A NOVEL*

BY

MRS ALFRED W. HUNT

AUTHOR OF

'THORNICROFT'S MODEL' ETC.



IN THREE VOLUMES

VOL. III.

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# THE LEADEN CASKET.

## CHAPTER XXXI.

Wilt thou reach stars because they shine on thee ?  
*Two Gentlemen of Verona.*

‘WELL, really, Mr. Willoughby, I don’t agree with you: I never shall! To my mind, an author who by one stroke of his pen can make his heroine enchantingly beautiful is the most churlish of creatures if he refuse to do it. Besides, it is a great pity to have any ugliness in the world that is not absolutely necessary.’

Such were the words which greeted Morrison’s ear, as, in obedience to the invitation received that morning at St. Hilda’s, he entered Mrs. Brooke’s drawing-room. That lady was the speaker. She was standing in the midst of a group of authors and critics, and they were all giving their minds to the knotty point whether

a heroine of commanding ugliness did not often succeed in riveting the affections of a reader even more firmly than a beauty. Morrison instantly decided in favour of the beauty, and looked round in search of Olive, but she was not in sight. She was probably in the inner room, but a crowd in the doorway prevented his ascertaining that.

‘Your new heroine, Mrs. Brooke, can’t be very attractive,’ said Mr. Willoughby; ‘that is, if we are to judge by the title of your book.’

‘Yes; really, what an odd one you have chosen!’ said another. ‘It is advertised for April, I see.’

This was the novel which Mrs. Brooke had submitted to Olive, and then to the ‘*Quixotic Magazine*.’ She had called it ‘*Cross-and-Fifty*,’ by way of antithesis to ‘*Sweet-and-Twenty*,’ and, as may be divined by this title, it still contained a very exact portrait of Mrs. Ullathorne. The sacrifice demanded by Olive had been too great for her aunt. The ‘*Quixotic Magazine*’ had refused the novel as a serial, but the publisher had taken a fancy to it, and had



offered a tolerably tempting sum, which Mrs. Brooke had accepted with delight, to be allowed to bring it out in the three-volume form. Still, though this was a success, she declared that she should never really feel that she had succeeded, until the day came when she had two publishers sitting in the breakfast-room waiting to compete for some MS. which she was finishing upstairs.

‘It is rather a repulsive title,’ said she thoughtfully. ‘I am sorry, but it fits the book.’

‘You have been photographing some disagreeable old maid,’ suggested a bystander.

‘No, much worse than that—a cross old widow. Such an exquisitely cross one!’

On this Lady Brooke, who had been feeling languidly tolerant of all that went on around her, became suddenly interested, and, though not much of a reader, resolved to make herself acquainted with the contents of her dear sister’s new book. She did not feel very loving to Mrs. Brooke at present, and, if her pen had been toying with Mrs. Ullathorne’s special characteristics, would not be averse to bringing the book under that lady’s notice.

Morrison pushed his way nearer to the

second room. It was not so crowded as the first. Olive was sitting on a sofa talking to Mr. Ardrossan; her back was turned to Morrison.

What a pretty little head she had, and how exquisitely beautiful were the curves which sloped down from it to her throat and neck! Her dress was a subdued white satin, in the folds and shadows of which lurked varying shades of faint green and grey, contrasting with the rosy flush of interest in her face, and the little ring of coral round her throat. She was deeply interested in what Mr. Ardrossan was saying to her, and had neither eyes nor ears for anyone else. At least, so it seemed to Morrison, and so in fact it was. The truth was, Mr. Ardrossan had accidentally shown some acquaintance with the east end of London, and Olive found that he was in the habit of going there constantly to look after one particular district whose inhabitants he was trying to raise and help. Ever since she had so unluckily failed to meet the woman who had written to her, Olive had been keenly on the alert to learn all that she could of the neighbourhood of Bethnal Green; and though the remainder of the address had for the moment entirely slipped from

her mind, she still hoped it would return to her. She was almost certain she should recognize the name of the street if she did but hear it mentioned. While Morrison was watching her with such a sudden and unexpected thrill of anxiety, she was saying to Mr. Ardrossan, ‘ You know Bethnal Green—can you tell me the names of a few of the streets?—the little shabby streets, I mean. I have a reason for asking this—perhaps I had better tell you what it is. I had a letter some time ago from some one there, a poor person. She gave me her address, but I only glanced at it. I was interested in the letter itself, and thought I could read the address afterwards, and then the letter was destroyed. It was a letter which I ought to have answered. I wish you could help me.’

‘ I will, if I can, you may depend on that. I will tell you the names of some streets, and if that won’t do I will get you a map. But would you know the name you have forgotten, if you heard it?’

‘ I think so; it was an odd one.’

‘ Perhaps it is in my district.’

‘ I hope so, I am sure.’ She felt implicit trust in Mr. Ardrossan’s readiness to help her.

‘Alexandra Street? Edward Street? Devonshire Street?’

‘No, I think it was something to eat. I know it was.’

‘Mulberry Street?’

‘That’s it! How strange that you should know it!’

‘It is in my district—at least part of it is. Perhaps I can help you to find the person.’

On this Olive suddenly grew alarmed, feared she was confiding too much, and said, ‘I don’t know that I ought to tell you more. What kind of people live in Mulberry Street?’

‘The poorest of the poor, and the lowest of the low,’ said he.

‘Do you go there often?’

‘Twice a week, for a few hours each time. My Scripture-reader would help you to find anyone you want.’

Olive felt embarrassed. ‘Thank you,’ said she. ‘I will think it over for a few days, and then perhaps ask your assistance. I am not quite sure that I remember the woman’s name. I feel very much obliged to you.’

Lady Brooke was going away for a week,

so Olive thought she herself might be at liberty to go where she liked, and, having learnt the name of the street, was resolved to do her best to find the woman—whose name she almost fancied was Deanham.

‘I will wait a few days, and then, if you wish it, do all I can for you.’

‘And please don’t say anything to Lady Brooke,’ said Olive, blushing deeply at having to make such a request. He bowed. This was odd, but he could readily imagine that there was little enough sympathy between Olive and her stepmother. Morrison saw the blush; his face grew darker and darker. The more he looked at these two on the sofa, the more it seemed to him that they were made for each other. What right had he to thrust his own unmeaning pretensions between Olive and one who was in every way so infinitely more worthy of her than himself? He was almost inclined to retreat quietly, and go back next day to St. Hilda’s and his work, and try to make himself believe that he had never been away. He was afraid, though, that if he did he would have to make-believe very much. What a perfect couple these two would make!

As this thought was stamping itself in on Morrison's mind, Mr. Ardrossan turned, saw his dejected face, almost read his thoughts, and said, 'I must not be so selfish as to monopolise you entirely, Miss Brooke ; here is an old friend of yours who would, I am sure, be glad to speak to you.'

Olive looked round, saw Morrison, smiled, bowed, and held out her hand. Somehow or other, Mr. Ardrossan disappeared while she was saying—

'How kind of you to come, Mr. Morrison ! It was almost a shame to bring you all the way from Chaucer Street just to hear what I have to say to you.'

'I would come much farther than that, only to get a glimpse of you, let alone a word ; indeed, I have come much farther. When your aunt's letter reached me this morning—by-the-by, I ought to tell you that it had been mis-sent, and had wandered about for nearly a fortnight—I was three hundred and sixty miles off.'

'Really !' said Olive ; 'but you should not have come so far. What made me want to see

you is that I have only just learnt from Mr. Ardrossan what a terrible walk you took for us when we were snowed up at Blair Angus. What ungrateful people you must have thought us ! Neither my mother—neither Lady Brooke, I mean—nor I had any idea how much we owed to you. We were told that some of the gentlemen passengers had walked along the line and brought help, and we felt very grateful to them ; but we never knew that you were the one to do everything, that you went alone, and hazarded your life at every step. Think of your doing that, and never even being thanked !’

‘ Oh, indeed, I was thanked, and far more than I deserved. I did nothing more than anyone else would have done. Besides, you did thank me in your letter—you——’

‘ That was only for giving me tea, and bringing Pearson, and many other kindnesses,’ cried Olive ; ‘ I could not thank you for getting us away, or running such great risks for us, for Mr. Ardrossan only told me about it a fortnight ago ; I have been most anxious to do it ever since—most uncomfortable, too, till I could do it. I now thank you most sincerely—I am so

glad that you were the one who did it all. It is just like a novel, isn't it?'

'I can't bear to look back on that night,' said Morrison; 'I behaved so shamefully!'

'Now, pray do not say another word about that,' cried Olive; 'I told you the exact truth in my note. I assure you you did not say one word then that I have not said to myself a hundred times. London and London life are all very well, but you don't know how often I wish I could go back to those happy old days at Austerfield! How simple life was there, and how perfectly delightful! Won't you sit down, Mr. Morrison?—do sit down.' And as Olive spoke, she moved her dress a little out of his way so as to make room for him by her side. There was room enough already, but the pretty gesture of invitation was eminently flattering to the bewildered young gentleman who stood so near her. He hesitated a moment, but only because he was gazing at her and thinking that he had never yet seen her look so beautiful. He sat down by her side, half intoxicated by his position, and by the words which she had just uttered.



‘It was indeed delightful,’ said he, after a brief pause ; ‘I know I have never been half so happy since——’ Unless it be now, was his next thought, but he dared not express it.

‘And such little things made us happy!’ she continued. ‘Do you remember how pleased we were one morning when we were in the shrubbery, and we found a bird’s egg lying on the leaf of a hollyhock? It was a wren’s, and it shone with a pink light and was covered with rosy spots—but how absurd I am to expect you to recollect such silly things!’

‘I remember everything!’ said he.

On this she blushed deeply, and said, ‘We were only children!’

She intended this as an apology for the past, but he said, ‘What have we gained by growing up? Not much, I fancy. It is hardly to be counted as a gain that we are so much more difficult to amuse.’

‘I am sure it is not. But we were easily pleased then! If we happened to find an orchis an inch or two longer than any we had seen before, it was quite enough to put us in high spirits for the day.’

‘Do you ever feel the same happiness now, when you are in the country?’ said he. ‘No doubt you do—I know I do; but then unfortunately, or perhaps fortunately, my work and my pleasure have so mixed themselves up together now, that I can’t enjoy nature as one enjoys a poem or a picture—I am always finding myself thinking how I am to contrive to give even a faint hint of the beauty I see.’

‘But what beautiful pictures you do paint, Mr. Morrison! I know they are good because they have exactly the same effect on me that reading a very fine poem or a bit of Mr. Ruskin’s writing has. I make all kinds of grave resolutions, and am so anxious to act up to a high standard.’

Morrison looked much pleased; but he must indeed have been difficult to please if such words as these, from such a girl as Olive, did not have that effect. ‘My pictures are not really good,’ said he: ‘you must not fancy that they are; but if work will make them so, they shall be. If ever I did succeed in painting pictures which the world thought good,’ said he hurriedly, and very nervously too—for he

saw a movement amongst the crowd which seemed to denote that his *tête-à-tête* must soon be interrupted—‘if ever this happened—and I dared to presume on our old acquaintance, and came to you then, and asked you to renew our happy old life, would there be any chance at all of your listening to me?’

‘But I don’t think I quite understand,’ said Olive, blushing nevertheless, and looking round in great alarm to see if any of the people in the room, who were now pressing so much nearer to them, were near enough to hear what was passing.

‘In those days, if you remember, we lived for each other—our happiness consisted in being together. We were only children, I know, and things have changed—changed terribly; but there is one thing in which I am not changed—I never was happy without you then, and shall never be happy without you now. I know I ought to keep all these feelings to myself—that a man in my position has no right to speak thus to you—but do answer one question: supposing I could win a name for myself, and thus lessen the difference between us, do

you think you could ever care for me?—would you share my life, I mean?—I am afraid it is too presumptuous even to think of such a thing!’ he added, for he could not but see how embarrassed she was.

‘Oh, no; not presumptuous at all—don’t use such dreadful words! On the contrary, you do me a great honour, but——’

‘“But”! don’t say “but,” dear Olive!—forgive my calling you so. I love you with all my heart; I would do anything to win you.’

Olive shook her head. ‘You must not think of this,’ said she.

‘Not think of this!’ he said, taking courage; ‘I shall think of it as long as I live. My love for you will last from the beginning to the end.’

‘It is impossible,’ she said.

‘Just answer one thing,’ said he: ‘do you think it is quite impossible for you ever to feel for me as you used to do? That’s what I want so to know. If you say yes, I must try to bear it; but if you think there is the least chance, I want to ask you to wait a year or two for me—to give me time to do something, I mean. You don’t know how I would work! But I

am in such dread of all kinds of things happening—of losing you before I have time to do anything.’

‘If I ask you never to speak on this subject again,’ said Olive faintly, ‘please do not think that it is because I feel that there is this difference between us of which you speak—I do not admit that there is—I consider that anyone who paints as you do has a rank far above any that the world can give—you honour me by thinking of me at all, but I must not let you do so—my mind is full of something else. I have no heart to give—I can love no one, think of no one, until the thing which fills my mind is settled.’

Morrison was quite bewildered. She looked so strange while she spoke, and seemed so in earnest. Was she engaged to some one else, or tortured by religious doubts, or on the point of turning Roman Catholic? What could it be? ‘But you won’t always feel in this way,’ said he. ‘Let me speak to you again some other time. Let me go away now with a little hope, and come back in—say, a year’s time.’

‘Oh, no!’ cried Olive; ‘it would be wrong

if I let you do that. I can give you no hope whatever.'

'You know you can never like me as you used to do?'

'I am afraid not. I shall always feel that you stand in a different relation to me from every one else—always have the greatest regard for you, and desire to be good friends with you—you must not ask for anything more.'

He tried to read her face—it showed the fixedness of a steady purpose ; he looked at the people in the doorway—they were still standing in a solid mass, and appeared willing to leave him still more time to urge his suit ; but all the people in the room with them showed symptoms of a desire to change their places, and one or two had come dangerously near. He saw this, but was resolved to use to the uttermost this one chance, and said in a low voice, 'Do not speak so very decidedly. Say I may keep just a little hope, and may come back in a year or so—I am not like a stranger, you know. I have felt as I do now ever since we parted as children.'

'Do not ask me to do this,' said she once more.

‘At all events, say that you wish me well.’

‘That needs no saying!’ she replied kindly.

‘I do, and always shall wish that. Let us always be friends, Mr. Morrison.’

He thanked her for this permission to call her friend, but he almost felt inclined to go somewhere where he would never see her again. It seemed to him that this would be infinitely preferable to meeting her occasionally as a mere friendly stranger. The break which had occurred in their conversation was observed—a gentleman who had been hovering about for some time, for the chance of a few words from Miss Brooke, now came and spoke to her, and Morrison went and joined the black-coated crowd which had been standing in the doorway so long. The new-comer dropped unbidden into Morrison’s place—the waves of society closed in; Morrison did not know how he got into the larger room—he was in no state to be conscious of pain or discomfort from without—when there he found himself side by side with Mr. Ardrossan.

‘Never dare to say that I have not behaved nobly to you to-night!’ said that gentleman; ‘I gave you my place without a murmur.’

‘You did ; it was very kind of you ; but don’t let me drive you away from Miss Brooke again. You and she get on a thousand times better than she and I could ever do. Don’t let me keep you from her. Good-night ; I am going.’

Mr. Ardrossan’s eyes followed his young friend with some curiosity—how much, or how little, did he mean ?



## CHAPTER XXXII.

I like not the humour of lying.—*Merry Wives of Windsor.*

I am a simple woman, much too weak  
To oppose your cunning.—*Henry VIII.*

HANNAH DEANHAM, Mulberry Street, Bethnal Green.—All that night of Mrs. Brooke's party, these names were never absent from Olive's thoughts. Even though she had just had an offer of marriage, she still found her mind recurring to them, and to the work which lay before her next day. As soon as she had the comfort of seeing the cab drive away with Lady Brooke to Euston Station, she meant to lose no time in setting out for Bethnal Green. She had told Morrison that she could think of no subject but one, and she had told him the exact truth—every wish of her heart was summed up in the one burning desire to establish her mother's innocence, and, that done, to

seek her out in her hidden retreat, gladden her heart by the tidings, and then to spend her own life in trying to make her mother's last years happy. No love should ever come to disturb that which she meant to give to the poor mother from whom she had been so long and so cruelly divided. She perfectly well remembered the unhappy, wasted-looking woman, with a face more noble and beautiful than any picture, who, not a year before, had come to the outside of Mrs. Ullathorne's house and had gazed in on her through the window, with eyes full of love and pain. That was her mother, her own dear mother ; and even if she were mad—even if she were shut up in Bedlam itself—Olive would rather stay there with her, if by so doing she could lessen her sufferings, than remain where she was with the base woman who had supplanted her.

Morning came. Olive was down first, but that was because she could not sleep. It would not have been easy to find anything which would prevent Lady Brooke from sleeping, and sleeping well. She came downstairs as usual, looking happy and peaceful, and thoroughly

refreshed by the night's calm rest. She noiselessly entered the breakfast room, and made for her seat and her letters. Olive busied herself with the teapot.

‘My dear, here is a letter from your Aunt Ullathorne. She is coming back next week,’ said Lady Brooke in a tone which betokened some slight vexation.

‘Indeed!’ said Olive, who did not care what happened, so long as it was nothing which kept her away from Bethnal Green.

‘Yes, next week; so we shall have to be ready for her.’

‘Is it certain?’

‘Yes; she seems to have overcome her desire to stay in the cemetery at Florence, though it does seem to have been very strong: so I suppose we may consider her return certain.’

‘I don’t understand,’ said Olive, who might perhaps not have been so stupid if she had been listening more carefully.

‘She describes the cemetery—she says it is lovely, and commands a most splendid view of the town. She dwells on the nice people who are buried in it. She finishes by saying that

she would perhaps hardly have liked to be interred so very far from home ; but I am sure, poor dear, if she felt that it was for her happiness to join them, it is a thousand pities she did not do so. Well ; we shall have to make some preparation for her.'

'Can't I do what is wanted ?' said Olive eagerly, in great fear that Lady Brooke might give up her journey.

'Of course you can. See that all the better china is put back in her cabinets and cupboards, and be sure to leave the doors wide open, to let it get thoroughly dusty, and then she will never know that we have used it. Do it carefully—she is very cunning. I hate cunning people, Olive !'

'So do I !' cried Olive, with extreme fervour.

Lady Brooke continued : 'Put the better things of all kinds away, just as she left them. You know what to do. I shall be back in four days—I did intend to stay a week, but four days will do, or even three.' And then she let her eyes stray over her step-daughter's face, and Olive could not but notice that there was a strange gleam of satisfaction in them which

seemed to betoken that this journey to Liverpool was one which boded her no good.

‘What a nuisance!’ cried Lady Brooke, returning to the perusal of Mrs. Ullathorne’s letter; ‘I did not notice this bit—“I forgot when I left home to ask you to be very attentive to Dr. and Mrs. Ullathorne; but I am sure your kind heart would lead you to show them every civility in your power without any prompting from me.” I am afraid that my own kind heart has led me to leave them in their own home. I suppose we ought to have had them, but we have not—will Mrs. Ullathorne be very angry?’

‘I don’t know—she can be angry.’

‘Well, you have not much to do, Olive; suppose you were to go in a cab with Pearson and make a call on them—you could do that while I am away. Go, and be very civil to them, and explain that nothing but ill-health has prevented our seeing a great deal of them. You might like to go to Bethnal Green? That’s where they live, isn’t it?’ And as she said this, Lady Brooke, though she appeared to speak carelessly, was attentively studying Olive’s face with eyes not altogether free from pleasure.

‘I don’t know—I’—stammered Olive, and then she took courage and said, ‘Do you wish me to go?’

‘No, I can’t say I do. Please yourself about it, dear—I am completely indifferent as to whether you go or not!’

Olive’s heart sank. Was Lady Brooke stating a fact, or making a chance speech? It sounded one of ill-omen.

‘Make Pearson get all our things together,’ continued the elder lady. ‘When I come back, I will see about some lodgings for the rest of the time I am here.’

Olive looked up in surprise.

‘Yes; I shall not stay long in England now—perhaps a few weeks longer—perhaps not so long.’

Lady Brooke had not been very explicit with regard to her journey to Liverpool. She had told Olive that she was going to see a friend off to America, but had left the name and all else in obscurity. It must, however, be some one in whom Lady Brooke felt great interest, for she was not in the habit of showing signs of affection which cost so much trouble as this journey would give her.

The cab came at eleven ; and then, dressed in warm velvets and furs, with soft shawls and rugs, and book and paper-knife, and every comfort necessary to her comfort-loving nature, she drove away.

‘Lor!’ ejaculated Pearson when she saw the last of her; ‘but this do surprise me! Lady Brooke has never once, since I’ve been with her, left me behind. She always says she can’t get along without me nohow ; and it’s true, she can’t! Well, I do wonder at her going without me now—so private-like!’

Olive heard this, and it made her feel unhappy ; a strange feeling of dismay came over her. She had thought that, when once her stepmother was gone, she herself would be quite free to go where she liked—now it seemed to her that it would be quite useless to attempt to go to Bethnal Green, for Lady Brooke would be watching every avenue of approach to the district, and, no matter how she went, would pounce upon her at once, and straightway put all her plans and projects to abject confusion. She dressed herself plainly. With ‘Bradshaw’ in hand as her credentials, she left Kensington Square. None of the servants seemed to remark

her departure. Pearson, whom she met on the stairs, had evidently not been ordered to insist upon accompanying her.

‘ Shall you be in at luncheon, Miss Brooke ? ’ said the maid ; but when Olive said she thought not, Pearson had no amendment to propose. Olive felt that she was left to do what she liked. She looked back to see if she was watched or followed ; she saw that she was not. ‘ First return, Mansion House,’ she said boldly, proud of her knowledge, for she had never yet travelled by the Metropolitan Railway ; but when she got to the Mansion House she was a very long way from her journey’s end, and as she drove in a rattling cab through the dreary streets, she felt them to be interminable. ‘ They talk of the poverty and distress of the people at the East End,’ thought she, ‘ but how can they ever eat up all the food in these shops ? ’ Provision shops stared her in the face every moment, and street succeeded street, and still she was far from her goal. ‘ Put me down at Mulberry Street, Bethnal Green. Ask your way, or do you know it ? ’ said she to the driver.



‘No. I can’t say as how I do know it. It’s not a part we’re often asked to come to,’ said he. ‘What number, Miss?’

‘I have forgotten the number. Put me down in the street—that will do.’

It was two o’clock when the cabman departed, full of delight with her want of knowledge of cab-fares. Mulberry Street! She had found it! And now she had an undefined feeling that Providence would vouchsafe some guidance to her—would give her some clue to the house. She held her ‘Bradshaw’ well in sight, and walked from one end of the street to the other, waiting for the mysterious prompting, which she was firmly resolved not to disregard. It was a long street, cut in half by a great dismal main thoroughfare. Olive crossed this, and walked to the very end, but had no feeling about any of the houses except thankfulness that she had not to live in any of them, and, as she walked back, her way was illumined by no heaven-sent intuition. She had carefully studied the names on all the house-doors and shops, but that of Deanham did not meet her eyes. When she had traversed both sides of

the street, she began to work in a new way. She ran after a postman whom she saw, and asked him if he knew the name. He almost thought he had noticed it on some of his letters, but could make no statement more precise. The policemen were ignorant—the provision shops the same; so then she thought she would inquire from door to door. It was a trying thing for a girl like Olive, who had scarcely ever been out alone even in the West End, suddenly to find herself exposed to all the incivilities of busy folks at the East. She came to a house which seemed to be inhabited by a number of lodgers—a woman in one of the downstairs-rooms tried to help her. ‘Name of Deanham wanted, do you say, Miss?’ said she.

‘There’s no demons here, it is to be hoped,’ cried a tailor, who was sitting on a table, working as if life depended on every stitch that he put in.

‘Deanham! Deanham!’ cried Olive, most eagerly, but all in vain.

‘The relieving officer might know,’ said the woman, ‘or the parish doctor.’

‘I’ll try them if no other way succeeds.

Will you make some inquiries for me? I may come in again on my way back.' The woman promised, and so did an affable green-grocer who had drawn near.

'Deanham, did you say, Miss?' said a tall, lanky, ill-favoured youth in another doorway, and he and his mother and two unpleasant-looking sisters came to talk, but Olive soon found that they knew nothing. Patiently she once more went from the bottom of the street to the top, lingering here, questioning there, but hearing nothing anywhere. She was weary and terribly disappointed—her feet ached, and she was faint with hunger. It was now nearly five, and she had not eaten anything since early morning. She saw a shop which was clean enough to inspire partial confidence, and went to buy herself some biscuits. While eating, she used her opportunity and asked the shopkeeper some questions—but he, too, had nothing to tell her.

'How much do I owe you?' said she, in haste to go; but when she put her hand into her pocket for her purse, it was gone—some of the more urbane part of the population who

had listened to her inquiries with politeness, had also relieved her of the trouble of carrying such a weight. She was aghast, and cried, 'My purse has been stolen!' and she looked so unhappy that the man believed her.

'Was there much in it?' he asked.

'Some silver—I don't exactly know how much;' and then she remembered that Lady Brooke had given her a five-pound note to pay a bill, and that was gone; and, worse than all, her return ticket was gone too!

'What shall I do?' cried she.

'So far as the biscuits are concerned, Miss—you have only eaten one, and you are welcome to it,' said he, and thought he had performed rather more than the whole duty of man.

'But my ticket—what shall I do?'

He put the lid on the biscuit-tin, and then set it rather noisily in its place on the shelf. She was not to have the run of that tin any longer. Olive saw that he would not willingly lend her money to buy a new ticket, and did not choose to expose herself to a refusal. 'Give me your name and address,' said she,

‘and I will pay for my biscuit by letter. I will walk home, I think.’ Murmuring something about, ‘Very sorry, I’m sure, but really there are so many impostors about,’ he let her go. She set her face westward, and was just going to sink into complete despair, when she remembered that she was undergoing this for her mother’s sake, and was reconciled at once, and strong to suffer; and then she remembered that she had no need to walk home—she could take a cab, and pay the man at the journey’s end—only, cabs were scarce in Mulberry Street. Feeling now more at ease about her return home, she thought she might venture to make a few more inquiries for Mrs. Deanham, and did so, but with no better result; and at last she thought she must delay no longer. It was half-past five, and as yet she had not seen a single cab. There was nothing for it but to urge her poor tired feet to fresh exertion. Suddenly, about a hundred yards in front of her, she saw a gentleman—he came quickly out of one of the poorest houses in Mulberry Street. She seemed to know his figure, and looked again with eager hope—he

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half turned, and she saw that it was Mr. Ardrossan.

She tried to overtake him; but he was walking so quickly that, do what she might, she could not lessen the distance between them. Her very desire to stop him seemed to paralyse her power of movement—she could neither run nor call. A carriage drove into the street—it was his—and in another moment he would have been gone, had she not raised her hand as a signal to the coachman, and he waited till she came up. Mr. Ardrossan put his head out of the carriage to see why he did not drive on, and to his amazement saw Olive, who, too much out of breath to speak, was standing in distress and confusion on the pavement near him. She blushed when she saw how surprised he was, and exclaimed, ‘Oh, how thankful I am that I have met you!’ and then a slight twitching of the muscles of her mouth showed that her excitement was inclined to take the form of tears.

## CHAPTER XXXIII.

Who shall account for the love that is lost?—JOAQUIN MILLER.

HE was out of the carriage in a moment, and by her side. ‘Dear Miss Brooke,’ said he, ‘what can I do for you? Only tell me, and it shall be done.’

Olive began to speak, but was ashamed to say, ‘Lend me a shilling to buy another ticket,’ and hesitated. ‘I have had such bad adventures,’ said she at length; ‘I will not keep you standing till I tell you all, but the worst is that my purse has been stolen from me, and my railway ticket is in it, and now—don’t laugh at me—I am here in this dreadful place, and can’t get home! I have been trying to find a cab, but cabs don’t seem to come here.’

‘But I hope you will allow me to take you home,’ said he. ‘Please do; I am rewarded for coming here to-day, when I was half in-

clined to go somewhere else, by having this chance of being useful to you.'

'If you will kindly take me as far as a cab-stand—that would be best—I could go back to Kensington in a cab—money does not matter when you are going home.'

'Oh, no; I wish you would let me take you the whole distance. It would be such a pleasure! I don't often have a talk with you.'

Olive made no further opposition; she thought the simplest and best course was gratefully to accept his kind offer. He made her get into the carriage. She dropped into her place like one who was thoroughly weary. She looked pale, and he could see that she was utterly dispirited. 'You have been trying to find your Bethnal Green correspondent, and have tired yourself to death,' said he.

'Yes,' replied Olive; but she felt not a little embarrassed.

'Why not let me help you?'

'Indeed, I would in a moment—I am most anxious to do so; but it is something I do so want to keep secret,' she said faintly.

'If you dare trust me with so much of your



secret as is necessary to enable me to be of some assistance to you,' said he, 'I promise you faithfully to keep all that you tell me secret, and to inquire no further—but don't let me persuade you against your better judgment.'

'It is such a strange secret—one so difficult to talk about,' pleaded poor Olive. How could she speak to anyone of her mother, and of the terrible thing that was said of her!

'Then, do not distress yourself,' said he.

'But you will think it so strange of me to refuse.'

'Nearly everyone living has some secret which he longs to keep hidden from all. I may ask you one thing, though—have you been successful in your search?'

Two bright tears swam in Olive's eyes—she looked down to hide them, and could only answer by a hopeless shake of the head.

'Well, dear Miss Brooke, remember that, if you like to entrust me with the name of the person whom you wish to find, my Scripture-reader shall visit every house in Mulberry Street, and it is impossible for him to fail. He is a poor man himself, and knows all the people

in the place quite intimately. He would have a far better chance of success than anyone else.'

'Thank you,' said Olive, who instinctively felt that her new friend was one in whom absolute reliance might be placed; 'the woman's name is Deanham—Hannah Deanham. She wrote to me from Mulberry Street, as you know; but I have been to every house to-day, and no one can tell me anything about her. She can't live there!'

'In two days' time, at the latest, you shall hear whether she is to be found or not, and no one shall know that you are interested in the search. The inquiry shall be made in my name, and I am constantly making inquiries of this kind.'

'Thank you,' again said Olive. Then she added impetuously, 'Mr. Ardrossan, don't think I don't trust you—I really should like to tell you all—I want help terribly, and know you would help me more kindly than anyone else would, except my Uncle Richard, and I am not allowed to talk to him.'

She saw Mr. Ardrossan's look of surprise,

and added, 'My aunt does not like me to talk to him of this—he is too ill to be worried about painful things.'

Mr. Ardrossan's face showed so evident a desire to help, and yet such a strong determination not to embarrass Olive by pressing his services upon her, that she could not but say, 'I will tell you all I can; you will think it strange of me to change my mind, but it seems so mean only to tell you half a secret when you are so kind, and yet I can't tell you quite all.' He smiled, and his smile was a very pleasant one. She began: 'Some one related to me was accused of a crime, and I believe falsely accused. I know nothing of the story—my aunt in Harley Street would not tell it to me—and I don't want to know it until I can prove it to be false; but for many reasons I am certain that the accused person was innocent. I had thought so for some time before I received that letter from this Hannah Deanham, asking me to meet her. She said, if I would meet her, she would put me in possession of every proof of innocence that I could wish. Isn't it hard that everything has turned out so badly?'

Mr. Ardrossan was sufficiently acquainted with Olive's family history to be quite aware what she referred to. He was silent for a moment, and then he said, 'But you did meet her?'

'No. I am not my own mistress. She made two appointments with me, and I sometimes think that I was very cleverly prevented from keeping either—now you see how important it is to find her.'

'She shall be found,' he said earnestly. 'But how did you happen to destroy her letter with the proper address? That was most unfortunate!'

'It was. I was obliged to destroy it, and in a moment, or it would have been seen; I had not even time to look at it. Now I have told you as much as I ought to tell you at present, but I must ask you on no account to let anyone know that I have spoken to you of this—especially not Lady Brooke.'

'No one shall know. But how am I to tell you the result of the inquiries I am about to make?'

'Write a line to me to Kensington Square.'

He nodded, and said, 'Now forget about this—it is not good to dwell on painful subjects—let us talk about our friend Morrison.' Olive blushed; almost for the first time that day she remembered what had happened the night before.

'He has been at St. Hilda's,' continued Mr. Ardrossan, looking at her pretty face with considerable uneasiness because of its change of colour. 'Did he tell you if he had done anything there?'

'No; he did not.'

'Did he say whether he was going back?'

'No. I do not know what he is going to do.'

Mr. Ardrossan continued to talk of Morrison—he particularly wished to know whether, as the saying goes, there was anything between Olive and his friend, or not. He piqued himself on being able to discover this by infallible signs after a very short conversation, and thought he did discover that there was nothing. Why did this discovery give him so much pleasure?—why did Olive's recent confidence make him so proud and happy?

He began to talk of other things. Olive

listened with delight, and though the way was long and the streets were most monotonously dull, she thought they got into a part of the town that was familiar to her much more quickly than she had anticipated. She was happy about her mother, for now she felt confident that she should establish her innocence. Mr. Ardrossan, who was strong and wise and practical, had promised to help her, and no one living could give such effectual help as he. She was perfectly satisfied to leave the matter in his hands, and for the first time for many weeks was able to feel interest in other things. He had always admired her, but to-day she was unusually beautiful. More than once lately he had seen her looking careworn and ill; never had he seen her more depressed than when she entered his carriage. Now he had the delight of being able to tell himself that this return to ease, and even gaiety, dated from the time when he had promised to devote himself to the task of helping her. He was perfectly right: she had not enjoyed anything for months as she was enjoying this conversation; her eyes were bright,

and gradually a faint rosy flush of pleasure overspread her face. 'Ah, Mr. Ardrossan!' she exclaimed when her long drive was all but over, 'you have made me forget all my troubles. I have never once thought of them since you promised to help me.'

He looked delighted, and began to thank her for what she had said; but soon he checked himself—there was such a danger of saying a little more than he ought. Against his will, his speech turned into a rather cold assurance of the gratification it gave him to be of any service to her. And, that said, he became very silent, and thought with bitter pain of the forty-and-five years which had already been lived by him, and which now seemed to thrust themselves so suddenly into such disagreeable prominence, and do their wretched utmost to make him feel that he belonged to an entirely different generation from the bright girl by his side. 'She is thinking me old enough to be her father,' said he to himself; 'that's why she speaks to me with such unguarded frankness. She would not tell a young fellow like Morrison

that he had made her forget all her troubles. She looks on me as she looks on her uncle in Harley Street; but with this in my favour, that she may talk to me—that it won't hurt me. Poor child! words like those of hers do hurt men sometimes, even though they have reached a mature age. I am supposed to have got beyond the age of sentiment.' Presently he remembered that he ought not to be so silent, and said, 'If we have the good fortune to find Hannah Deanham, I should like you to allow me to do all that is done to conduct the business further. Bethnal Green is a long way off, and not a very nice place for a young lady like you; besides, people of her class are sometimes rather difficult to deal with.' He carefully toned down his speech to mere benevolent friendliness—he wished to place this matter on a purely business-like footing. Seeing that she was just a little slow in answering, he added, 'If you can trust me to do this, I will act for you as if you were my own——' he hesitated, the sacrifice of saying 'daughter' was too gigantic for him—he made the attempt, but it ended in his using the word 'sister.'



‘I do trust you most thoroughly,’ said Olive, looking in his handsome face, as she spoke, with such a pretty expression of implicit reliance that he felt nearly beside himself; ‘and I am so thankful to you too. I have been very unhappy about this for a long time—ever since I first knew about it; and I am so entirely without the comfort of having one single person to whom I can speak. You don’t know how strange it is to go about with something like this, which is very important and very dreadful to think about, filling your mind, and you not able to speak of it to anyone.’

‘Dear Miss Brooke,’ said he, ‘if you will pay me the great compliment of trusting me, I will do my best to be worthy of confidence. If there is anything you want done, will you employ me?’

‘Indeed I will,’ replied Olive earnestly. ‘Thank you most heartily for allowing me to do so. Now that I have you to advise me I feel quite happy; for, even if I fail, I shall know that everything has been done that could be done.’

This was all that could be desired; but how

rarely does happiness come in a perfect form ! In a minute or two more she was assuring him that having him to talk to was quite as good as having her Uncle Richard !

‘Forty-five,’ thought he, ‘that is my age ; and yet, if she would overlook the disparity between us, I am absolutely certain that I could make her a thousand times happier than any young fellow going—but then she would have to love me first. I wonder whether such a thing is possible?’

By the last post on the night following, Olive received a letter from Mr. Ardrossan to say that he and his Scripture-reader had devoted the whole of that day to the inquiry after Hannah Deanham, and that they had made a thorough search in every house in Mulberry Street and near it, but no such person was there, or had been there, for many months. He promised to bear the subject in mind, and to continue his investigations in the neighbourhood ; but in the meantime he advised Olive not to think too much of the letter she had received—such letters were frequently written merely with the object of extracting money

from those to whom they were sent, and were totally false and untrustworthy. This might be one of that kind. His letter was extremely kind ; but Olive felt a weight of pain fall on her as she read it—she had not till then realised how close to her heart lay the desire to clear her mother's reputation. How could she ever bear the anguish of living with this dark stain on her life? She read Mr. Ardrossan's letter once or twice. It was clear that he thought Hannah Deanham's letter was the production of a mercenary impostor—how terrible it would be if she herself were at length compelled to believe the same thing ! The shock this letter gave her was most unexpected and bitter—she had been buoyed up all day with hope—she had been so certain that Mr. Ardrossan would be successful.

And while Olive was sitting in a dark corner in Mrs. Ullathorne's drawing-room, far too miserable to look up or turn to the light, Lady Brooke was lying back in the most comfortable chair that was to be found in the best room of the best hotel in Liverpool. She had drawn it close to a bright fire, had made the waiter

bring her a small table on which were set the wax candles which would soon play such an appreciable part in her bill ; beside these were two yellow-backed French novels, a box of chocolate, and a plate with some cut lemons—she had read somewhere that lemons prolonged life, and to her life was sweet. To her the world was a perfect one ; and life, so long as she could manipulate it a little, perfect also. Who could have been happier than she, as, loosely clad in a warm fur-lined dressing-gown, with her feet in fur-lined slippers, she lay back basking in the consciousness of having just conducted an extremely difficult and important piece of business to a fortunate and thoroughly successful conclusion ? It was now more than a year since she had received an intimation which a fidgety or unnecessarily nervous person might have suffered to destroy all her peace. Lady Brooke had of course not been untouched by this warning : it had had the effect of bringing her to England ; but she had not come to England in such a state of alarm and anxiety that she had been unequal to the task of coping with the threatened danger when it presented

itself. On the contrary, she had retained the command of all her faculties—she had been cool, collected, and capable from first to last, and the glorious result was this—that very day she had taken Hannah Deanham on board a big Cunard steamer bound for New York, and had seen it steam away with her!—she had for ever silenced and got rid of the woman—the only living person who had it in her power to injure her. Now she feared no one, and could only think with delight of all that she had done during the last twelve months. Another woman would have lost heart when she heard that Hannah Deanham had set out from Australia for the purpose of revealing all that she knew. Lady Brooke felt no fear at all, provided she could get speech of the woman. She perfectly understood her character. She had not come back from any wish to do right, but simply because she wanted more money—give her money, and she would again go away as she had gone before. The last sum paid her had kept her away nearly twenty years—the same sum repeated would have the like effect—in twenty years more she might come or go as she chose—most of those

who were now interested in hearing her story would then be beyond reach of being affected by it. It had been rather a wrench to part with the large sum of money required to bribe Hannah Deanham to take her departure ; but such sacrifices have to be made sometimes, and to grieve over them is to double the pain they give you. Hannah Deanham was now rolling on the open sea, and Lady Brooke trusted to her promises so implicitly that she never once wished that the ship which contained her would go to the bottom. That worry was gone out of Lady Brooke's life for ever ! She would now go back to her husband. She would tell him of all that had been done for Olive—how beautiful she was, how much admired, and how certain to marry ; and if after that he still continued to be so tiresome and so unhappy about her, Lady Brooke did not intend to let his low spirits affect hers as before. She would henceforth live more for herself. And so she sat the live-long evening through, and read her book and was happy. The danger which had so greatly threatened her was overpast—why should she not be happy ? Happy she was—

nay, even gay—and once she laughed aloud, and laughed again with pleasure at the sound of her own merry voice, and this time her mirth was prompted by the thought that perhaps this very day, poor, silly, wool-gathering Olive was wandering, footsore and unsuccessful, from house to house in Mulberry Street, Bethnal Green, seeking in vain for the writer of that ill-written letter, of which Lady Brooke was now almost certain that she herself had read more than the person for whom it was intended. ‘Poor, silly goose of a girl,’ she said to herself; ‘I gave her a tolerably plain hint that if she went she would certainly lose her labour! I hope she did go—it will teach her not to have plots and schemes which she is not clever enough to manage. I shall always be amused when I remember her futile efforts that day to get out to meet Hannah Deanham. How stupid she was! she had two splendid chances, and lost both! If she had only had the sense to walk across the square to Gloucester Road Station as I should have done, she would not have been caught by me in King Street. Never shall I forget how dismayed she looked when she saw

me! She really is a charmingly pretty girl, but no one can say that she has the least control over her features—you can always see what she is thinking—and then she actually let me get to the Carmelite Church first!—Hannah Deanham and I were just going into the passage to Palace Gardens, when the Raymonds' carriage drove up with Olive; but, then, one minute in advance is as good as fifty, when it is enough to make you safe.'



## CHAPTER XXXIV.

Quand on n'a pas ce qu'on aime, il faut aimer ce qu'on a.

THREE weeks after that evening at Mrs. Brooke's, Morrison was on his way back to St. Hilda's, and most heartily he wished he had never left it. His journey had brought him nothing but vexation and weariness. He had of late thought far more about life and how to shape it than anyone is intended to think—of that he was convinced. For the future, he would trouble himself with no such perplexities—he had his work to do, and that was enough for him. He reached St. Hilda's about six—the evening was dull, the sea leaden; nothing was bright but Mrs. Pickering's face, nothing warm but her welcome. He was glad to get back. His books and sketching folios were lying about, the rooms looked very homelike, and after dining comfortably he sat down to read. After

a while a most unaccustomed sound met his ears; some one next door was playing the Pastoral Sonata.

‘Oh, deary me!’ cried Mrs. Pickering, who chanced to be in the room at the time, ‘I never once thought of that happening! I might have sent word that you were expected, and then I am very sure and certain you would never have been plagued with any music.’

‘Plagued! Mrs. Pickering! it is magnificent. It is Miss Keithley who is playing, I suppose?’

‘Yes, it’s her, I’ll be bound for it; but she’d never have set that pianny open if she’d ha’ known you were here. She’s well aware you don’t like music—I tell’t her myself you didn’t, and she must have seen you setting the organs off!’

‘Not like music! Organs and accordions are not music—I should be a barbarian if I did not like such music as that!’

‘So the owld lady next door said, sir, when you were here before!—her servant girl told me she did; but Miss Rose, sir, she said as how she was a bit of an artiss herself, and quite understood the artistic temperment, and that you

shouldn't have none of your work spoiled with listening to her playing whether you wanted it or not !'

'And so she denied herself?'

'Indeed she did ! But she has made up for it since you left, sir. It's not a deal of penting can have been done by her ! She has sat for hours together at that pianny. Our Cuthbert he says he likes it, and it is good music, and he knows what good music is. But, lawk-a-mercy me, Mr. Merrison ; but it is mournful and dowly-like, and you hear it so fair ; and when all's said and done, it is more like the tune the old cow died of than anything else ! For my part, I often wish her fingers would tire.'

'How are the ladies next door, Mrs. Pickering?'

'Oh, none so well, by all accounts. First the owld lady had a bad bout, and then the young one ; but I reckon the young one must have been a deal the worst, for she carries illness set on her face.'

'I am very sorry——' began Morrison.

'Ay, so am I. I am sure she has been real bad.'

Morrison expressed great regret, and felt it; but then he was silent, for he wanted to listen to the sonata, and said so. Mrs. Pickering unwillingly retreated. Miss Keithley played the Toccata of Galuppi and then shut the piano. To think that she had foregone such a delight as her music must be to her, for his sake! It was another proof of her unselfishness. He felt a strong wish to thank her, and scribbled a line to Mrs. Keithley to ask if he might run in for half an hour during the evening to shake hands with them. His note was only a civil formality, as he had a standing invitation for the evening; but as they had both been ill, and he himself away, he did not like to presume upon it. Soon came an answer. ‘Mrs. Keithley regrets that she is unable to receive Mr. Morrison this evening. She is not quite well, which Mr. Morrison must kindly accept as her excuse.’ He threw the note down with a slight feeling of disappointment; but a minute or two afterwards he picked it up again to see if he was right in fancying that it was very stiffly worded. It did seem so. Perhaps they were annoyed with him for going away so abruptly

without a word of warning ; but he had written a line from London to say that he had felt a sudden desire to get back there for a week or two, but meant to return to St. Hilda's, and hoped to see them again when he did. They had no right to be offended with that. He resolved to pay a formal call next day, well within the limits of the prescribed hours, and then make his peace.

He did call. Miss Keithley had gone out ; Mrs. Keithley was not very well. He felt sorry not to see them, and went for a long walk. Next day, for the first time, he ventured to look at his pictures. It is always a terrible moment for an artist when he confronts a bit of his own work after an interval of time during which he has perhaps been allowing himself to think hopefully of it. That first glance after an absence reveals so much that had escaped the eye before. For once, he experienced no strong revulsion. He even began to work. The pictures were thoroughly dry and in a delightful state to paint on, and he never stirred from that room for ten days, except for meals. Even at night he was occupied with them ; for night

and its comparative obscurity helped him to see the composition, and he could always find enough to do in studying parts. At last they were done, and he had the strength of mind to see that they were so, and took his hat and went to make another call next door. While he was standing outside, he could not help wondering why his friends had left him so long without taking any notice of him—he had not had time to think of this before. It was more than ten days since he last called—he had already tried to see them twice—if they could not admit him when he offered a visit, why not fix a time when they could?

‘The ladies are out driving,’ said the servant. Morrison had nothing to do, now that his pictures were finished ; so, rather by chance than by choice, he walked to the railway station. It is true that the view there was finer than almost anywhere else. He was standing under the portico, and looking across the river, when some one brushed past him with some boxes, and Morrison saw that they were addressed to Austerfield. The name startled him—so did the thought that Auster-

field was only twenty miles off. What if he were to go there?—the train was just starting—he could stay there all night, spend a long day, and then come back to St. Hilda's and pack his pictures and return to London. In five minutes he was on his way—in an hour and a half he was there. He had not seen the village since he was fifteen—it had disappointed him then—he did not expect to admire it more now; but nevertheless he had a strong wish to go there.

Next day he came back, having spent a long morning in visiting every field which he and Olive had frequented as children, and in gathering nearly every flower which he could find in them. These he packed in a basket which he carried to the station, and at once despatched to her.

He was walking along the quay to his lodgings, when he saw the two Keithleys in a carriage. He stopped to speak, and was shocked to see that Miss Keithley looked very ill—almost as ill as her aunt. ‘I have been wishing so to see you!’ cried he. ‘May I not do so?’

‘Oh, certainly,’ said Miss Keithley kindly. The older lady began to say something which did not sound so encouraging. He pretended not to hear it—he was determined not to let her be offended with him without a cause—he would insist on hearing what was amiss, and set it straight at once.

‘You are going home now?’ said he; ‘may I come in for a few minutes presently? I want to bring you these primroses,’ he added, showing a large bunch which he had in his hand, and which, up to that moment, he had most certainly meant to keep for himself. ‘I have been in the country—I had no idea they were out till I saw them.’

His visit was accepted, and he went. Mrs. Keithley received him. ‘My niece is tired,’ said she; ‘you will kindly excuse her.’

Morrison thought this very odd—he fancied that he could observe that Mrs. Keithley wished to prevent his renewing his acquaintance with her niece. ‘I was sorry to see that Miss Keithley looked very pale,’ said he; ‘I trust she has not been seriously ill?’

‘She has been rather ill,’ replied the lady,



in a manner which distinctly showed that she wished to cut his inquiries short.

‘Has she been able to go on with her picture?’

‘No; I don’t think she has done much to it—but I don’t know much about what she does before I am up.’

‘Oh, by-the-by,’ exclaimed Morrison, who was determined not to be frozen by Mrs. Keithley until he had said all that he wished, —‘one thing I should like to beg her not to give up, and that is her music! I had no idea that Miss Keithley was such a musician. From something that my landlady has told me, I am very much afraid that Miss Keithley has denied herself the pleasure of using her piano on my account. It is very kind of her to think of me; but will you be so kind as to tell her that I am passionately fond of music, and hers could never be anything but a delight to me?’ Seeing that Mrs. Keithley’s aspect was severely cold, he continued: ‘I speak in this way because Mrs. Pickering told me that Miss Keithley did not play because she was afraid of disturbing me. I feel extremely sorry if this is really the case.’

‘Rose always does think far too much about other people! It is very foolish of her—it’s ridiculous! No one thanks her for it.’

‘I thank her most sincerely! She meant to do me a great kindness.’

A faint indication of a desire to sneer appeared on Mrs. Keithley’s thin lips. Morrison saw it, and said hastily, ‘Mrs. Keithley, I wish you would tell me why you are angry with me?’

‘I am not angry with you—young people know their own minds best.’ Here she paused, as if intending to say no more; but suddenly, and as if in spite of herself, she burst out with, ‘However, I should have thought that intimate as we were, and seeing each other so frequently, and you engaged, too, to come in after tea that very evening—it was not quite the thing—not exactly in the best of taste, to go off as you did, and stay away so long, and never send a line to explain your conduct until nearly a week had passed by.’

‘But, Mrs. Keithley, I told you in my letter from London—I am very sorry if I was so long in writing it, I am sure—I did not know I was—my head was so full of other things—I told

you in that letter that I had been unexpectedly called away to London. I really don't see why that should make any difference in your kindness to me.'

'Well, I don't know, I am sure——' (How Morrison wished she were a little bit more lady-like!—but he had no idea how much worse she was going to be, or how soon the thin veneer of conventional manners rubs off those whose politeness is not part of themselves.) 'In my young days young gentlemen did not run after young ladies, and take long solitary walks with them, and come to see them almost every night of their lives, and seem to be so happy in their company, unless they meant something by it. You say that your head was so full of something else that you forgot to write to us for nearly a week. Now, I say that, considering how you had been going on here, your head had no business to be full of anything else! However, though we might be foolish when you were here before, don't say that we had anything to do with bringing you back now. You can't say that we have either of us lifted a finger to bring you back this time!'

Morrison was so amazed that he could not speak. The thought which first came into his mind was, is it possible that Miss Keithley knows that her aunt is speaking thus? The idea was horrible to him—but he dismissed it as impossible. He drew a long breath of utter dismay. He had a chivalrous veneration for all women—he would have sacrificed much that he cared for rather than Mrs. Keithley should have dropped thus from the high place he had assigned to her in common with the rest of her sex.

‘You surprise me,’ said he. ‘I had no idea whatever that I was behaving ill. I have a great regard for Miss Keithley. I did not think it wrong to show that I had. Circumstances threw us together more intimately than is usually the case, but I do not feel that I have behaved ill. Does she think that I have?’

‘No ; of course not. At least, I have no idea what she thinks. She is a meek-spirited, uncomplaining creature, just made, as it would appear, to have her heart broken. So am I. In a general way, I am as meek as the rest ; but when it comes to ruining the happiness of

anyone whom I love as I love my niece Rosamond, I must say what I think.'

'May I ask if Miss Keithley knows that you are speaking to me on this subject?'

'Certainly not! She would never forgive me if she did! It would kill her. I should never have dreamed of saying anything to you if you had not brought it on yourself; but you appear to wish to come back as usual, and the only way to prevent it seems to be to let you know why I don't wish it. I am only speaking as a woman of the world—that's all.'

Disagreeable and serious as this conversation was, when she said this, Morrison could have smiled. The widow of a retired law-stationer, who had spent her life, when well, as law-stationers' wives do—and, when ill, on the sofa of some second-rate lodging-house by the sea—was claiming to talk as a woman of the world! This thought forced itself into his mind, but he was ashamed of it immediately. What did it signify whether she were a woman of the world or not?—the world to which she referred was not that by whose maxims he wished to square his conduct.

Before he could speak, the door opened and Miss Keithley came in. She had been requested to absent herself, but had been seized by a sudden fear that her aunt, whose sentiments with regard to Mr. Morrison she well knew, might be so unguarded as to express them to him. She glanced uneasily from Mrs. Keithley to Morrison—she saw by their faces that they had been talking very earnestly, and on some subject from which they could not readily divert their minds; she felt ready to sink into the earth with shame. Mrs. Keithley was conscious that she had gone too far, and said, ‘Now, Mr. Morrison, as my niece is here, you had better say to her what you have just been saying to me—about the music, I mean.’

Morrison gladly seized on this chance of concealing the unpleasant situation, and heartily thanked Miss Keithley for her thoughtfulness. She began to think that she had alarmed herself in vain, and that they had not been talking about anything so very particular after all. She spoke to him with her usual kindness, and he had no difficulty in perceiving that she did not wish him to feel that he had in any way

behaved ill to her. He rose to take leave. Mrs. Keithley looked uncomfortably conscious of what she had said, but, woman of the world though she was, could find nothing to say which would retrieve her position. When Morrison shook hands with her, he sincerely hoped that it was for the last time. Not so when he held out his hand to Miss Keithley. As she placed hers in his, she said, 'I must bid you good-bye for some time, Mr. Morrison. I am leaving St. Hilda's the day after to-morrow—I am going to London to stay with my Aunt Ullathorne.'

'In Kensington Square?' cried he in great surprise.

'No; in Bethnal Green—her husband is rector of St. Dionysius.' And Morrison went back to his lodgings thinking, 'Rosamond Keithley is a far-away cousin of Olive's!'

All through that long evening his thoughts ran in the same groove in which they had run the night before he went to London and to Olive. Would that he had never gone! He had then made up his mind that it would in every way be well for him to let himself love Rosamond Keithley. What had he gained by

violently breaking away from that decision? Nothing, so far as Olive was concerned; and when Miss Keithley's white face rose up before his mind's eye, he was afraid that, even if he had gained anything, his gain would have been a loss. What would his future life be to him if, so long as it lasted, he had to turn his thoughts away from one part of his past, as too painful to dwell on? Henceforth he would always feel that a stain rested on his honour. He had thoughtlessly enjoyed the good which came in his way, without considering anyone but himself. He, a man whose heart was filled with love for another woman, had no right to seek the society of any girl so constantly as he had sought that of Rose Keithley. Night after night he had gone to her house, and she must naturally have felt that she herself was the object of his visits. He certainly would not have gone to see that aunt!

He had behaved very ill, and he knew it. Olive was hopelessly beyond his reach, he knew that too; but how bitter it was to be obliged by honour thus suddenly to take a step which would irrevocably part him from her. It was



his duty to take it. He sat down and wrote a letter to Miss Keithley, folded it, and sealed it, and then he put it in his pocket and went out. For an hour or more he walked up and down the pier in the cold moonlight—the strongest wish of his heart was at war with the equally strong fiat of his conscience. He had made up his mind before, to try to win her love ; but he had meant to do it gradually, testing his own feelings as he went on, and being careful not to do or say anything which would make it dishonourable for him to turn back, if he found they were insufficient. But now all was to be done at one plunge. He was at once to relinquish the dream of his life, which, even though he knew it was only a dream, had been a delight to him, and must be a delight no longer ; there was no help for it. It was after midnight when he walked slowly home ; and, as he passed the Keithleys' door, he noiselessly dropped his note into the letter-box. She would not know that it was there until next morning, but he would have the satisfaction of feeling that the thing was now beyond his control. 'I have done what is right,' thought he, as he

entered his own door, 'but, as long as I live, I'll never see that odious aunt of hers again!'

It was late in the afternoon next day, and no answer had come to his note. 'She must have received it,' he thought. 'Surely she could have written an answer of some sort.' He went out, thinking, as he did so, that when he returned he would see a square note lying in the centre of his sitting-room table, and that on that note much depended. He chose the pier for his walk, because it was often the loneliest place in St. Hilda's. It was entirely deserted now. He walked along, enjoying the bright wintry sunshine, which shone on the white crests of the waves as they eagerly bounded in. He walked quite to the end of the pier before he saw that one person besides himself was there—Miss Keithley was leaning over the wall, watching something so intently that she did not know he was near her until he spoke. 'What is it that you are looking at so earnestly?' said he; but, before she could answer, he saw for himself what it was. The tide was high, and two or three fishing-boats, which had gone out the evening before, were taking

advantage of it to come in; but, while they themselves were still hidden from sight by the curve of the pier, their shadows were strongly thrown on the wall of the other pier, opposite. Spectral boats, manned by spectral sailors, danced buoyantly in, and soon came the real boats of which they were the precursors.

‘Are they not pretty?’ said she; ‘but they are rather ghostlike.’

‘Very!’ said he; and then he added abruptly: ‘You have not answered my letter!’

‘I could not,’ said she quietly. ‘It took me by surprise. I do not feel that you care for me in that way!’ She did not look in his face, but her own showed that she was suffering acutely. ‘I am so afraid that my aunt said something to you yesterday which made you feel that you ought to do this. It was very wrong of her if she did—both wrong and absurd!’

He could not bear to see her distress, and said hastily, ‘Do you remember the last walk we had together—from Rastwick Nab I mean?’

‘Yes, perfectly,’ said she.

‘Well, the night after that I made up

my mind that the best thing I could do for my own happiness was to ask you to be my wife.'

'For your own happiness?' she asked eagerly. She was in such terror lest Mrs. Keithley should have impressed on him that this step was necessary for hers.

'Yes; for my own happiness. I thought so then, and I think so still. Now what do you say?'

'I say, yes,' said she, in a low but very distinct voice, and she laid her hand in his. His closed on it in a firm grasp while he said very fervently, 'And I will try to be worthy of you.'

He did not go to see her that evening; he felt as if he could never endure to see her aunt again: but next morning he went to the station to see her off. She looked very pretty and happy; in her hand were the primroses he had gathered at Austerfield. 'I'll see you on Saturday,' he said, as he put her into the carriage; for, as soon as his mighty packing was over, he was to follow her.

'Good-bye, till Saturday, then,' said she;

and, as the train swept round a curve in the line and passed out of sight, he saw a hand waving a bunch of primroses in token of farewell. He felt very strange. They were Olive's primroses, gathered in fields sacred to all true and loving memory of her, and he had given them to another. He himself was Olive's, and had given himself to another too ; but, as he walked back to Mrs. Pickering's, he still felt that he could not have done otherwise.

## CHAPTER XXXV.

Be thou armed for some unhappy words.

*Taming of the Shrew.*

LADY BROOKE had engaged lodgings in Welbeck Street. She had no longer a house and a carriage and good old servants at her disposal, but was left to her own resources. She was, however, happy in the thought that the work which she had come to England to do was done, and well done, and that in ten days more she would be on her way back to India. One morning Mrs. Vincent Raymond came to take her a round of shopping. As the two ladies had a good deal to say to each other, they left Olive at home. 'She looks ill, Honora,' observed Mrs. Raymond, who caught sight of Olive as she watched their departure from the window. 'Is she anxious about this new love-affair of hers? He is sure to propose, isn't he?'

‘Quite sure, I should say. When a man of his age takes a fancy to a girl, he is usually very much in earnest. He will make her a far better husband than Sir John Ellerton would have done. I am very glad she would have nothing to say to him.’ The two ladies were referring to Mr. Ardrossan, whose visits had of late been very frequent.

Hardly had Olive been alone ten minutes, before Lady Ellerton was announced. She had passed Mrs. Raymond’s carriage in Oxford Street, and had seen the two ladies with their worldly heads bent together in the most earnest conversation, on which she had instantly resolved to make use of this opportunity of finding Olive alone. Olive was delighted to see her. She had long been most anxious to know if she was forgiven, and she saw forgiveness in every line of Lady Ellerton’s face.

‘You had my message, dear?’ said Lady Ellerton. Olive had received no message, and said so. Lady Ellerton shrugged her shoulders slightly, and said, ‘I wrote to Lady Brooke about six weeks ago. She asked me to dine with her, and I thought I had better decline

that, but I asked her to give my kindest love to you, and to say how thankful I was to you for remembering your promise to me. You chose the right course, dear—it was a thousand times better to cut away all hope at once.’

‘ You are speaking of my going away to Harley Street when Sir John came to dine with us. I know it was rude, but if I had stayed he would have thought I wished to give him encouragement.’

‘ Precisely. When he found you were gone, he at once understood what you meant. What is one sharp pain, to what he might have had to suffer if you had behaved as Lady Brooke wished? ’

‘ How is Sir John? ’

‘ Well, I thank you ; he is yachting in the Mediterranean, doing his best to forget you, dear.’

‘ It makes me so miserable—’ began Olive.

‘ It need not. He will, I hope, be happy yet, and you too, dear Olive—I ran in this morning to tell you that you had my best wishes! Think of me as your friend. I shall always rejoice in your happiness as sincerely as I do now. Good-bye.’



Olive was slightly puzzled by this speech. She supposed Lady Ellerton to be uttering benevolent wishes generally—she had no idea that that good lady had come on purpose to congratulate her on her engagement to Mr. Ardrossan, which in some circles was already spoken of as a settled thing. This visit was a great comfort to Olive, who went back to her music glad to think that she was forgiven. The door opened suddenly. She had been so intent on what she was doing, that she had not heard the bell. Mr. Ardrossan came in. He looked strange, and Olive saw in a moment that he had not come to pay a mere ordinary visit.

‘You are alone?’ said he, coming rapidly forward; ‘I was told you were. Miss Brooke, can you come with me at once to Bethnal Green? I have found the person of whom we have been so long in search—at least, I have found some one who is as important as she.’ Olive’s heart seemed to flutter and stand still—she looked too much astonished to speak.

‘Don’t lose a moment. She wants to see you, and I promised to take you at once. Just fling a shawl round you—my carriage is waiting, and we must lose no time.’

‘Is she dying?’ said Olive with great hesitation.

‘No, not exactly—I mean, she will live some days longer, but she is dying.’ Olive was ready directly.

‘Back to Mulberry Street,’ cried Mr. Ardrossan, and in another moment they were on their way. This had come so suddenly that poor Olive was almost ill with the shock. She sat with hands clenched together in the effort to bear the excitement quietly, but her eyes were anxiously fixed on Mr. Ardrossan. He grasped her hand for a moment reassuringly, and said, ‘Have no fear. I will tell you all that I know myself. Parnell—he is the Scripture-reader—Parnell and I went on making inquiries, and as we had been so unsuccessful, and as you were still so certain that Mulberry Street was the right address, I began to puzzle my brains and try to think of every possible thing which could be working against us. You had told me that this Hannah Deanham said that she could supply ample proof of the innocence of the person in whom you are interested. She had therefore probably been a lady’s maid,

or nurse, in your relative's family. She did not wish you to come to Mulberry Street, you said, but to communicate with her by letter. She had therefore some reason for keeping you away from her home or lodgings, and, though she signed herself Hannah Deanham, perhaps did not give you the name by which she was known there. Hannah Deanham may have been her maiden name, and she may have had two reasons for giving it to you—one to prevent your finding her in Mulberry Street if you went there to seek her, and the other to inspire you with confidence. I mean, supposing that you had gone to anyone who was acquainted with some of the circumstances which this woman professed to desire to tell you, and had asked if anyone of the name of Deanham was ever a servant in the house, you would naturally have received an answer in the affirmative, which would have made you inclined to trust her. This seemed the obvious reason, but I could not help letting my mind dwell on her odd prohibition. Why should she tell you not to go to Mulberry Street? There seemed to be no reason why she should wish to keep you away

but one, and that was that there was some one there who was either extremely desirous that you should remain in ignorance of the things which this Hannah Deanham was offering to tell, or else much more anxious to do what was right and to tell the whole truth than she was herself. I fastened on the latter supposition at once, and acted promptly on the new idea. Hannah Deanham had a companion whom she did not wish you to see. Parnell and I began to look in every direction for a woman who had been a lady's-maid in a gentleman's family and who was now living in Mulberry Street with some mother, aunt, or sister. We did not seem to be on the right track till yesterday, when we heard of a poor woman who is very ill indeed and who seems to have no one to attend to her. She is a thorough invalid, and will never be well. She was nursed by a sister, it seems, until lately ; but I find that on the 7th of February this woman took it into her head to go off to America. Her name was Hannah—Hannah Wilkinson—and she had never said anything about going to America to the people in the house with her until just before she went.'

Olive started. The 7th of February was

the day on which Lady Brooke had gone to Liverpool to take leave of a friend who was starting for America. 'The 7th of February,' said she, 'is the day I went myself to Bethnal Green to find Hannah Deanham—how strange it should be the day she left.' 'But I should not have been allowed to go if she had still been there,' she added, for she remembered Lady Brooke's indifference to her movements that morning.

'Yes, but she went by the name of Hannah Wilkinson when there, and probably that is her name now—she is a widow.'

'Tell me one thing,' said Olive imploringly; 'you have found the sister: tell me, was my feeling true—is my mother—can this sister prove what I want her to prove?'

He looked her very kindly in the face, and said, 'I think so—I hope so—she says she can; but, dear Miss Brooke, I have respected your secret—I have not allowed her to speak of it to me. She told me that she could not die in peace until she had revealed a secret which has ruined the happiness of an innocent woman. Her great wish was to see you quickly, so I came for you at once.'

‘Thank God! my prayer is heard!’ said Olive; and she covered her face with her hands and spoke no more till the carriage stopped, when she said in a frightened whisper, ‘Are we there?’

He reverently helped her out of the carriage, drew her hand within his arm, and took her up a very narrow, dark and dirty, staircase. He did not stop till they came to the door of a room on the third floor. Olive’s heart sank lower and lower, and when he said, ‘I will just speak to her and then go and wait for you in the carriage,’ she could have grasped his arm in her terror, and have begged him not to go out of her sight; but for her mother’s sake she was brave. He took off his hat and knocked at the door. No one came, so he half-opened it, and through the opening, Olive caught a glimpse of a poorly furnished, miserable-looking room. A square of faded carpet lay on a by-no-means clean floor, a chest of drawers stood between two small uncleaned windows. On the top of it was a toilet-cover placed awry, a looking-glass whose frame had given way, a shell-box, and a cracked bottle full of yellow drinking-

water. Mr. Ardrossan stood before Olive, and was speaking to some one inside: 'Mrs. Gardiner,' said he, 'here is Miss Brooke. She did not lose a minute in coming to you when she heard that you had such a wish to speak to her.' He took Olive's hand and led her in, and then she saw a pale, wasted old woman, tightly wrapped up in a shawl which had been so often washed that all trace of its original colour or pattern had disappeared, and now it was a mere dingy grey. She was lying propped up with pillows on a gaily painted iron-bed. Her hair, which was pure white, was drawn back under a close-fitting white cap. Her face was a delicate oval, and there was a certain amount of refinement in her features; but her eyes, once blue, were now dull and glazed, and she seemed to be half-blind. She turned to where Olive was standing, and said, 'But I don't see her, sir. I see a lady there beside you, but she may be anybody. Come close, Miss, close—if you are like your mother, I shall know you at once.'

Much as Olive shrank from the neighbourhood of a woman who had, as she believed, betrayed her poor mother so cruelly, she forced

herself to go nearer to this unfortunate creature, who thrust her wan face within an inch or two of her own, and peered into it with those terrible eyes which seemed to be more than half-dead already. She gazed thus for some time, and even stretched out a shrivelled hand to touch Olive's hair. Olive shuddered, but a warning glance from Mr. Ardrossan urged her to control her terror.

‘It's the same face. It's the same hair. Oh, many's the time that I have seen her go out dressed for a ball and have felt sure that no angel in heaven could be more beautiful. What she must have suffered!’ And, as she said this, the unhappy woman began to weep convulsively. Two tears ran slowly down Olive's white face. She was standing by Mr. Ardrossan—by a look he tried to comfort her.

‘You must not think that I have brought you here to waste your time in watching me cry,’ said Mary Gardiner at length. ‘No, I have prayed for this chance, and I've got it. I don't want to go into the Lord's presence with a crime on my conscience which I was too hardhearted to own to when I was alive. No



good will come of owning it now, but the Lord above us well knows that that's none of my fault.'

'You had better try to collect your thoughts, so as to be able to tell Miss Brooke exactly what you wish her to know. I will leave you now, Miss Brooke; you will find me in the carriage—I will wait as long as you like.' And, as Mr. Ardrossan said this, his eye wandered round the scantily-furnished room in search of a chair for Olive. Having found one he left them, and then Mrs. Gardiner spoke.

'Miss Brooke, your name is Olive?'

'Yes,' replied Olive faintly.

'I know it is—I was your nurse. I was your mother's too—not from the beginning, but from the time when she was kind of growed up. I went to Wilburton Hall, which was her home, when she was ten years old, and Miss Alice eight. I left it with your mother about ten years after, when she married. I knew all her family; I remember the young gentleman who first courted her, whom we all thought she was going to marry. His name was Lilburn; he was as handsome a gentleman as ever stepped,

and well liked by everyone, especially by us servants, and Miss Dorothy would have married him if Captain Brooke had not come forward. Not that his coming forward made your mother think less of Mr. Lilburn, who was her own choice. She was as fond of him as ever, but her father and mother thought that there was no comparison between the two gentlemen, and did their best to show Mr. Lilburn that he was not wanted. They made her give him up and marry Captain Brooke, and I went away with her as her maid. Captain Brooke was a very kind gentleman and fond of her, and, poor lady, she did her best to seem happy. I often think that they would have ended by being as happy a couple as any you see, if Miss Honora Calthorpe had not stayed so much in the house with them.' (Olive clenched her hands: she had felt this—she had known this—from the very beginning.) 'She was a school friend of your mother's, and had spent months upon months with her at Wilburton. She was at the wedding as chief bridesmaid, and there was not a servant in the house who did not say, when they came home from church that day, that one

of the bridesmaids would have liked to change places with the bride. There had been a great deal of talk about Miss Honora and Captain Brooke all along. Some of us maintained that she was very deep in love with him. She had been so, it was said, before she found out that he did not come to Wilburton for the sake of seeing her, but her friend, Miss Dorothy Ainsley, and when Miss Honora did discover the truth, she still hoped to turn him into a lover for herself, because she knew that your mother was set on marrying this other gentleman. Miss Honora was terribly disappointed when she lost Captain Brooke, and could not quite hide it; but it is my belief she felt nothing but the loss of his money and good prospects, for it was not in her to trouble herself much about any man who was not well off. Anyhow, she should never have set her foot in the house if I had been able to keep her out, but your mother was always kind to her—more's the pity, for she suffered for it. Miss Honora came far too much between husband and wife; and though she was supposed to be your mother's friend, she always played the part of being your father's. When trouble came

she sided with him altogether, though none could have known so well as she how hard the poor young thing had tried to be a good, true wife.'

'Mrs. Gardiner,' sobbed Olive, who felt utterly cast down by these words, 'you are not going to tell me that my dear mother was not a good wife?'

'Indeed I am not! She did not love your father as a wife ought to do, but he knew that when he married her—he was not deceived—he would have her: but as for her being a bad wife in any other way, she was not, and I can prove it.'

Olive almost shrieked, 'You can? You are sure? I knew all that was said against her was false—but how can we prove it was?—it is so terrible not to be able to do that!'

'I can do it, Miss Olive,' said Mrs. Gardiner, faintly but firmly.

'Oh, why did you not speak at the time, then? Why did you let her be condemned?' groaned Olive.

The sick woman shook her head, and said, 'You shall hear how it was—wait, Miss Olive, until I tell you all.'

## CHAPTER XXXVI.

Well excused !

That thou didst love her strikes some scores away  
From the great compt.—*All's Well that Ends Well.*

‘TELL me all, then,’ said Olive, in a voice which no one would have recognised as hers.

‘I will, but my story will be a long one, and I have hardly strength to tell it. Six months after you were born, your father had to return to India, but your mother was not well enough to go with him. Your Uncle Frederick came to London to stay with her, and that’s what brought on all the trouble. He was a very kind young gentleman, but, oh dear! he was a foolish one. One bad thing which he did was to bring to the house that young Lilburn who had been engaged to your mother. It was terrible thoughtless of him, but he did it. Your mother, poor lady, let your father know that Mr. Lilburn was coming a great deal

to see her, and your father he put his foot down at once, and said he would not have it! So Mr. Lilburn was informed that he must come no more. Poor gentleman, he went away telling your mother that as long as he lived he would go through fire and water to serve her, but he looked broken-hearted. The next thing silly Mr. Frederick did was something he had given his father a faithful promise he never would do—sign a bill for a friend. Major Clinton—that was his friend's name—told Mr. Frederick that putting his name to the bill was a mere form, that the money he was signing for would never by any chance be required of him, and young Mr. Frederick, who ought to have had more thought of his promise, did sign, and then troubled himself no more about it. Three months afterwards he received a letter to say that the bill would be due on the 15th and must be paid on the 18th—they gave him three days' grace. I was sitting in your mother's room, with you, my sweet innocent, on my knee, when Mr. Frederick he danced into the room crying out, "Oho! Oho! Here's a nice bit of reading for a timid, young, faint-hearted gentleman to sit

down and enjoy!" And your mother she took the letter and thought it very serious; but your uncle he caught it out of her hand and told her not to behave like a baby who did not understand business—he understood business himself, he said, and knew that this letter meant nothing. It had only been sent to him because he had signed the bill, but a similar notice had of course been sent to Major Clinton, who had drawn it. Major Clinton was the man who had to make the payment, he said,—he himself had nothing to do with it. Then your poor dear anxious mother looked up and said, "Go to Major Clinton, dear Fred, and then you will be quite sure that he understands his part of the transaction." At first Mr. Frederick would not, but she said so much to him that next day he did go. He went away whistling and tossing up his cap, but he came back looking a changed man, for Major Clinton had left the country, and it was pretty clear that he had taken himself off because he could not meet this bill. Your uncle was told that he must pay the thousand pounds or be made bankrupt; but though he

had not fifty pounds in the world, he was more afraid of his father's getting to know what had happened than of anything else. He ran upstairs to his own room and locked the door, and your mother ran after him, for he had said something which made her afraid that he was going to shoot himself. He would not open the door at first, but at last she got into the room and did her best to comfort him by telling him that she knew quite well how to raise the money; but he just lay on the bed as if he had no hope left. She, poor thing, was ready at once with a plan to help him. She got together every bit of jewellery she had, and some of her things were really splendid. She tumbled all these into a bag and made my sister Hannah, who was her maid now that I was nurse, go with her to see if she could not raise the money on them. Dear lady, her feet were not made for going such errands, but she went to a jeweller's shop, and said what she had come to do. She was terrified when the man looked at her very suspiciously, as if he thought she had perhaps stolen what was in the bag, and asked for her name and



address. "I don't see that you need know that," she said. "Just count up what these jewels are worth, and let me have their value. I know they are very valuable."

"We must have your name and address, madam," repeated the man, and he pulled out a book to write it down. "What we do is this: we take your address, and then we seal up your parcel with a note of the price which we intend to give, written outside it, and return it to you while we make inquiries. If, in the meantime, you break the seal, we retract our offer."

"But why should you do that?" said my lady. "Why should my breaking the seal make any difference?"

"Because we should know that the contents of the parcel had been offered elsewhere."

"But if you do all this, when can I have the money?"

"If you could call again in a few days' time——"

"Too late!" cried your poor mother, "you must let me have the money at once."

“It is our way of doing business,” said the jeweller with great indifference ; and no more than that could be got out of him.

“They will all say the same thing to us, Hannah,” said your mother to my sister as, much disappointed, she left the shop. Hannah told her that the pawnbrokers were the best people to go to, but the poor lady shook her head. Presently she recollected Mr. Lilburn, and that he had said he would go through fire and water to serve her ; so she made up her mind to go and ask him either to sell the jewels for her or to pawn them. She and Hannah saw him. Hannah never left your mother all the time she was talking to him. Hannah stayed with her while she waited in his room till he came back with the money. He was away for an hour or so, and after all was not able to get it that day, but said he would give it to them the next, if they could come again at the same time. Hannah and your mother did go the next day, and again Hannah never left the room ; and yet, when the trial came, and they accused your mother, dear innocent lady, of spending hours

alone with Mr. Lilburn in the hotel where he was living, Hannah actually let it be said, and swore, that they had been alone together all the time, on both occasions !’

‘But,’ cried Olive, ‘when so many people knew the truth, why did no one speak ? Who first brought such a wicked accusation ?’

‘I do not know. Miss Honora was the one who had the most to say about it. I shall always believe that she was the one to write and tell your father what had happened, and to persuade Hannah to say that your mother and Mr. Lilburn had been so long alone together.’

‘But why did my Uncle Frederick not speak ? He knew the truth, and should have told it.’

‘He was dead, Miss Olive ! He shot himself before your mother so much as got the money.’

Olive shuddered. What a terrible tragedy she was hearing !

‘Yes,’ said Mary Gardiner, ‘that is what he did. He was afraid of his father’s anger.’

‘But why did my mother not make the

whole story known? She could have brought witnesses to prove it.'

'Poor dear lady,' said Mary Gardiner, speaking with great difficulty, 'she could not do anything as she ought to have done it. She seemed as if she couldn't think, or didn't care. Your uncle's death nearly killed her—she was quite out of her mind at the time—and then, when she was getting over that, this new trouble came; and when she found that your father doubted her truth, she never held up her head again.'

'And they still went on with the trial?'

'Yes, we servants all thought it was gone on with that master might marry Miss Honora. She had been coming and going all the time. I thought then she must be plotting something with Hannah. I know she did, now.'

'You say that this Hannah swore to something which she knew to be false. What were you about to let her do it?'

'Miss Olive,' cried the poor woman in a voice of great agony, 'you may well ask that; but what could I have done? You see, I knew nothing but what Hannah herself chose to tell

me. At first she told me that she had never left them alone ; but when I reminded her of that afterwards, she said I had made a great mistake, for she had never told me that she had stayed with them, and that I must please to remember that she would be put on her oath at the trial, so she was not at all likely to say what was untrue. At last I did not know what to think.'

'Then how did you find out that she had sworn falsely?'

'I first suspected it by this. Hannah, who always spent her wages as she went along, had all at once money enough to pay her and my passage out to Australia, and to set us up there in a good business. Why were both of us to go so far away, and where did the money come from to take us? I began to make sure that it came from Miss Honora, who was so anxious to get your father for a husband that she was quite willing to give handsome presents to anyone who helped her.'

'But all this is mere supposition,' said Olive, sadly and very hopelessly.

'No, it is not ! It is more than that. Years

afterwards, when Hannah and I were both well married, she owned it. She said she had done a very good deed, and it was nothing to be at all sorry for. She said your father had by this time most likely got a wife who really loved him, which he had not got before, and that your mother had recovered her senses, and had then been heartily glad to find herself divorced, and free to marry Mr. Lilburn, who was the only man she had ever loved. I have three or four letters Hannah wrote, all telling me this. She and I did not live in the same place after we were married, and I had many troubles. I had never been really easy about your poor mother's trial. I had always had a secret fear that she had not had fair play. After I had buried three children—all the children I ever had—I fell into quite a low way, and used to sit thinking of them and of your mother, and of what she must be suffering, if she had recovered her mind, at having her only child taken from her. I wrote to Hannah about this over and over again, and told her I was sure she had forsworn herself, and begged her to confess and that was why she wrote those letters.'

Olive at once pounced on this chance of obtaining a bit of direct evidence. ‘You say you have these letters, Mrs. Gardiner?’ cried she.

‘Yes, I have them. They are hidden away in a very safe place. When Hannah was here I was afraid of her getting hold of them, and since she left I have never been well enough to walk across the room to the place where they are.’

‘Let me get them,’ said Olive anxiously. ‘Mrs. Gardiner, you will let me have those letters?—you ought!’

‘Yes, you shall have them, Miss Olive—I intend you to have them; but never mind about them now—let me get on with my story—I feel faint—last time I fainted was after Hannah went, and I did not come rightly to myself for days.’

‘Let me get you the letters, and then you can go on with what you are telling me—you see, the letters are so important.’

‘My story is important too, and you had better let me tell you the end of it while I can—I can’t say much more—I am well-nigh spent. The doctor says if I faint again I shall

most likely not come out of the fit alive, so you had better let me make a finish.'

'Oh, do let me get the letters,' pleaded Olive. 'If you were to faint or be ill again, I should never get them.' Even while she was speaking, Olive feared that she had lost her opportunity of securing them. Mary Gardiner seemed to be lapsing into this dreaded state of unconsciousness. Her eyes were closing heavily, and her head was sinking low down on her breast. The poor woman was exhausted by her long story—that, together with the excitement of dwelling on these painful recollections, was overpowering her. Olive got up to see if she could find anything in the shape of refreshing food. A dusty brown teapot was on the hearth, and a still dustier kettle stood beside it. She placed this on the handful of red cinders which did duty for a fire. Meanwhile, Mary Gardiner had recovered a little, and when Olive turned round after doing this, she saw her poor faint eyes fixed on her with a renewal of intelligence in their glance. It was only for a moment, but the sight made her hopeful. 'Now that I am on my feet,' said she, 'let me give you those



letters. Don't think of tiring yourself by talking any more until you have had a cup of nice warm tea.' Mary Gardiner did not look as if she would ever speak again—her head was once more nodding on her breast. Olive was very anxious, but earnestly hoped that this was nothing more alarming than a momentary attack of sleep. She stood silently watching her, and waiting till the kettle would boil. Suddenly Mary Gardiner awoke with a start and looked eagerly around ; her eyes were too weak to see across the room. Olive spoke, and a look of intense relief came over the sick woman's face—she had feared that her listener was gone. 'Yes, get the letters, Miss Olive,' said she, answering the question which had not until this moment penetrated to her mind. 'They are in a little flat box which is squeezed tightly in between the back of that chest of drawers and the wall. The key is here, safe under my pillow. Push your hand into the bed—feel well about, and you'll find it.'

Olive found both key and box, and, that done, gave Mary Gardiner the tea which she had prepared for her. Inside the box were

three or four old letters tied together by a black ribbon.

‘Take them all. Read them when you get home. They are all from Hannah. She has asked me about them more than once since we came back here, and, may the Lord forgive me! I said they were burnt. You will see that she owns she took a false oath—it’s all there; but you shouldn’t have been in such a hurry for the letters, Miss Olive; you might have waited till I’d got my story told. It’s a chance I ever finish it now!’

‘Why do you wish to finish it now, after keeping silence so long?’ asked Olive doubtfully, afraid lest after all there might be some flaw in the woman’s truth.

‘Did I not tell you that I had been wanting it told all along? You will see that, when you go through those letters. Would you have me die with such a crime on my conscience?’

‘But you did not commit it.’

‘I did not. Not for worlds would I have done such a thing. But I had a good guess what Hannah must be doing. She changed her story so much, and she was so often closeted

with Miss Honora ; and though she pretended that it was all about doing their very best to bring poor mistress's mind back, I felt sure it couldn't be about that. I did not commit the crime, I know that—but I let it be committed without telling my secret thoughts, and, besides that, I profited by it. Hannah and I went to Australia with money enough to keep us respectable all our days, even if we had not married—though, mind you, I had nothing but what she gave me.'

'Why did you come back to England?'

'Hannah came back because she had run through all the money she took out with her, and wanted the new Lady Brooke to start her off again with some more. She wrote to her to England, and the letter had to be sent all the way to India, and Lady Brooke never answered it. It turns out now that she came home on purpose to speak to Hannah instead of writing. Lady Brooke is not one to put what's dangerous on paper. When Hannah got no answer, she set off home. I fancy she thought to herself if the one side would not give her money to hold her tongue, the other might to

make her speak. She never said that to me, for she knew how I wanted her to confess. She didn't want me to come home with her, but my husband was dead as well as hers, so I thought I'd come. I let her have no peace all the way home about telling the truth. I said, if she didn't, I would. She said she would, and she wrote to you. She was very much afraid of my writing to you, but my health broke down on the way home, and I could not write, and she would not let you be brought here. That's what makes me think she never really wished you to know this, unless you showed yourself willing to give her money for telling. Lady Brooke got hold of her letter to you, and met her instead of you, and she gave her five hundred pounds to go to America with a cousin of ours, but Hannah never told Lady Brooke that I was still alive and here in London. Hannah left me fifty pounds of Lady Brooke's money. It is more than I shall ever want.'

'Then, you have again taken money for holding your tongue?'

'Miss Olive, I did not want to hold my tongue! My only wish was to do what was right.'

‘Then, why did you not write to me?’

‘Because I was anxious you should be happy. I should never have lifted a finger to bring you here if the Scripture-reader had not told me you wished to speak to me. Hannah told me before she left that I should do terrible harm if I did speak; for you, Miss Olive, were just going to marry a very rich and high-up gentleman who would not like to have this old disgrace raked up again, and besides that, she said it was of no use to rake it up, for all those who had suffered by what had been done were dead and gone. I knew myself that Mr. Frederick had shot himself, and that Mr. Lilburn had died in the West Indies soon after the trial, and Hannah told me about your mother dying in a private lunatic asylum ten years ago; and she said over and over again that speaking now would only make your father end his days in misery, and perhaps be the cause of your great match being broken off.’

‘They have deceived you again,’ cried Olive; ‘all this is untrue. My dear mother is not dead—I saw her ten months ago, and I am not going to be married.’

‘Miss Olive, is that true?’ cried Mary Gardiner, in dismay.

‘It is perfectly true.’

‘Deceived again! Left here to die alone, with not a single soul to tell me a word of truth! And every penny I spend is got by letting their wickedness go on! I am living on the price of innocent blood! Come what will, I’ll not do that! Miss Olive, put your hand once more under my pillow—you will feel a paper parcel.’

Olive obeyed, and with some difficulty found what she wanted. ‘Open it, please,’ said the poor woman, faintly. Inside were nine five-pound notes and a couple of sovereigns. ‘That’s what’s left of her fifty pounds—Lady Brooke’s fifty pounds. Take them, Miss Olive, and give them to her. They came from her and they shall go back to her—food that’s bought with that money shall never cross my lips again—no, not if I die for want of it.’

Olive stood motionless. ‘Take it, Miss Olive—give it back to her.’

Olive burst into tears and cried, ‘I can never speak to her again!’

‘You won’t take it for me?’ said Mrs.

Gardiner, giving way to a feeble passion of tears. With the selfishness of old age and illness, she could only think of her own wishes and feelings. 'You refuse? You won't take it?' she wailed.

'I will take it; I will either return it to Lady Brooke, or give it to some poor creature who is in want.'

'Do so. Say you forgive me. Say you will pray to God to overlook what I did. It was not my fault; both Hannah and Miss Honora were far too clever for me; that's how it happened.'

'I do forgive you,' said Olive, who was quietly crying. 'I will tell my mother how unhappy you have been, and I will do all that I can for you; but you must do one thing more: you must leave a written confession behind you—it need not be in your own writing, but you must sign it. My mother is alive, and we must have every proof of her innocence.'

'Then, have it done now. I have talked too much. When to-morrow comes I don't suppose I shall be alive—if I am, I sha'n't be fit to do what you want.'

'I'll get Mr. Ardrossan to come at once,'

said Olive, and ran down and told him what she wanted.

‘Both Parnell and Dr. Ullathorne are at the Mission-room,’ said he. ‘It is there, at the end of the street. I’ll go and bring them directly. She can make her deposition in their presence; you had better stay in the carriage.’

Olive assented faintly; she was completely exhausted. Before he left her, she gave him the contents of her purse and said, ‘Give this to Mrs. Gardiner; she has no money at all.’



## CHAPTER XXXVII.

And Sleep, that sometimes shuts up Sorrow's eye,  
Steal me awhile from mine own company.

*Midsummer Night's Dream.*

‘TAKE me to my aunt's in Harley Street,’ said Olive to Mr. Ardrossan when all was done and he rejoined her. ‘I must never see my stepmother again!’ As she spoke, she raised her heavy eyes to his, to see if there was any fear of his trying to persuade her to temporise or be patient. She was determined not to adopt either of these courses, but felt as if she had no strength to contend with him. He bowed. He wrapped her in a warm rug, for he saw that she was cold with exhaustion, gently made her lie back, and then said, ‘You have only to express your wishes—they shall be obeyed.’ She said no more, but lay still considering with herself what she had better do. She resolved at once

to tell all to her uncle, and to beg him to lose no time in freeing her mother's name from dishonour. So far as her own future was concerned, she had but one plan—her very life should be given to make her mother happy. She felt an intense satisfaction in the thought that the false Lady Brooke would now be brought down from her high estate, and made to suffer some of the bitterness of the life to which she had doomed the friend of her youth. When Olive thought of her father, she never considered that he would be pained by what she had discovered; her feeling was that it would remove a mountain of care from his mind to learn that the wife whom he had loved so much had been innocent. Swift justice should overtake the guilty, and then she and her father and her mother would for the rest of their days dwell together in love and trust. Thank God for letting this come to pass! Such were the thoughts that filled her mind all the way home, and she sat looking straight before her, with eyes bright but bitter, with flushed cheeks, and lips most firmly set together. Never once did she seem to be aware that she was not alone.

The carriage stopped in Harley Street. Then Mr. Ardrossan spoke. 'I shall leave you now, Miss Brooke,' said he; 'but for heaven's sake do nothing rashly.' There was a look of cruel determination in Olive's face which he did not like. 'I shall come to see you in the morning, but Dr. Brooke will be your best adviser.'

'He must see that justice is done, and done quickly,' said Olive firmly. 'For twenty years they have kept me from my mother!'

'You will not act without advice?' said Mr. Ardrossan anxiously.

'No, I promise you I will not. Good-bye, Mr. Ardrossan. As long as I live, I shall never forget your kindness to me.' She put her hand in his as she spoke, and grasped it warmly in her gratitude. It lay there a moment, and then he raised it to his lips and said, 'God bless you! Look on me as entirely devoted to your service.'

She went in to her uncle's house, and, without speaking to the servant, opened door after door, until she had penetrated to the sanctuary of the consulting-room. The window was

open, a keen March wind was blowing in, but no one was there. Her eyes turned to the mantelpiece, and she saw that it was four o'clock—an hour when her uncle was never to be found at home—she had imagined that it was about one. When she left the room, the man-servant was still in the hall. Dr. Brooke was out, he said, and would not be back till nine. He had gone down to Brighton to see Miss Lucy, but would be home in time for Mrs. Brooke's reception.

'Oh, it is Tuesday?' said Olive drearily. She had forgotten that on that evening her aunt held a salon.

'This 'amper's for you, ma'am,' said John, pointing to a hamper-like basket on the floor. 'It came about half-an-hour ago. Mrs. Brooke said you were expected here to-night, so we need not send it on to Welbeck Street.'

'Was I coming here to-night? Oh, I forgot.' She forgot everything now but the one all-important fact that her mother was innocent, and that she had the proofs of this in her pocket. She went into the dining-room, took out the packet of letters, and began to read.

Each and all proved the truth of what Mary Gardiner had told her, and Olive had no difficulty in perceiving that this poor woman, who was not half so clever as her unscrupulous sister, had been alternately soothed and deceived by her as seemed most convenient. Olive's heart swelled within her as she read. So far as evidence went, these letters were all that could be desired ; but for every false word in them she longed to inflict years of torture on the wretches who had behaved so infamously. She pined for her uncle's return ; it seemed cruel that she should have to postpone her revenge until he came. She would have liked to go at once to the so-called Lady Brooke, and, stripping her of her stolen name and place and honour and regard, drive her forth with execration.

She must have been sitting thus for more than an hour when she heard Mrs. Brooke's voice in the hall. ' Miss Brooke here, you say, John ? Why did you not let me know ? Did you tell her that some flowers had come for her ? I know they are flowers, because I lifted up the corner of the hamper. If she is

in the dining-room, take it in to her.' And Mrs. Brooke, who had just pleased herself beyond all expectation in an extremely difficult bit of description, ran into the dining-room, kissed Olive, spread out a newspaper to receive the hamper and flowers, and cut the strings which tied down its lid, without once looking into the poor girl's face; and before she could do so, she was called away. Before going, she threw back the lid of the hamper and revealed a mossy bed in which were wedged eight or ten bunches of primroses, large and bright as none but country-primroses can be, and with luxuriant, crinkly, well-nurtured leaves. Besides these, were dark purple crows'-feet with their black-speckled leaves, and golden muscadine as fresh as when plucked, and daisies and so-called buttercups, and some frail lilac-streaked anemones. One had its little brown twig-like root attached to it, and when Olive saw that, she remembered days long gone by when it was such a grief to her and to Willie when they ran to gather a wood anemone, and the plant only yielded up its flower with its life. Some time before this recollection came to her, she had

divined that these flowers came from Austerfield and were sent by him. She had known it instinctively as soon as the hamper was opened. No one but he could have known the delight that such flowers as these would be to her. Most lovingly she handled each bud and leaf and spray, as one by one she lifted them out and placed them in order on the table. The first layer of flowers and moss was removed, and now came some stiff shoots of blackthorn, and branches of softly glistening small-leaved ivy, and twigs of hazel and willow, with faint green catkins, or the large downy grey ones fledged with golden plumage and looking like young ducklings which have just chipped the shell. Everything that could be found at this early season was there, even a small sheaf of Olive's well-remembered pink-sheathed sycamore buds and some closely-shut crozier-shaped fern-leaves. Never in her life had any flowers given her half the delight that these first-fruits of spring's daring gave her now. Her youth, and the thoughts which had filled her mind when her feet had strayed over the fields where these flowers had so lately grown, swept back with a

force that well-nigh overpowered the cruelly painful present. The basket was still not empty. Here she had a primrose root with some of the russet-brown oak leaves of the year before still clinging to it. They were dry and withered now, but had helped to build up its warm winter's nest. And what was this beside it?—A branch of something with crumpled and half-unfolded leaves of the most tender green. One or two gentle touches of Olive's fingers uncurled them, and then she saw that it was a bit of lime-tree, and she knew the tree which had borne it, and why it had been sent to her! The sight of this, and the sharp contrast between the time when she had not a care in the world, and the present, when she had seen and suffered so much—the shame she felt when she remembered that, only a few minutes before, revenge had been almost more in her mind than justice—completely overpowered Olive, and when Mrs. Brooke came back, she found her sitting with her face on the dining-table, sobbing as if her heart would break.

‘What is the matter, darling? Don't cry so—don't spoil your beauty. I expect such



delightful people here to-night—Olive, you must stop.’

But Olive only wept the more, and when she was able to explain what had happened, her aunt did not wonder at her tears. Mrs. Brooke made her go and lie down, gave her some food, and promised most faithfully not to let Lady Brooke penetrate to her place of refuge. Olive relied on her word, and, after an hour or two of painful and disturbed thought, fell asleep. The noise of carriage wheels grinding harshly against the curbstone, and the flinging back of the doors of hansom-cabs, awoke her. She was lying in the dark in a bedroom which was strange to her ; she had not dared to go to her own, lest Lady Brooke should come in search of her, and know where to find her even though told that she desired to be left alone. It was dark, save for the light which came from a gas-lamp in the street. Doors opened and shut, names were loudly announced, voices and sounds of all kinds multiplied, and at length Olive remembered that her aunt was seeing her friends that night, and they were arriving in quick succession.

She lay quite still, and at last her weary eyes closed again and she heard no more. A hand touched her roughly. 'Miss Olive! Miss Olive!' said one of the servants who was all-unconscious of her anguish, 'do you happen to know where the cellar-key is?'

Olive started up, crying, 'What has happened? Is it anything very bad?'

'Oh no, Miss; not bad at all—at least, not in the way you think. We can't find the cellar-key nowhere, that's all. Every one of us has been looking for it more than an hour, in every place we can think of, but we can't find it, do what we will.'

Olive felt confused—she had been sleeping very heavily. 'Have you asked Mrs. Brooke about it?'

'Yes, Miss; she knew it was lost before the company came, for the wine was to have been got out ready, but no key could be found. She said we was just to look about everywhere till we found it, for it couldn't be very far, because she had it at five o'clock. She knows that, for just before she went into the dining-room to speak to you, the cook sent a message

to her to ask for a little rum to flavour her creams, and she got it for her, and then went straight to you in the dining-room, where you was arranging your flowers, and what she did with it then she does not know. We thought you might have picked it up, Miss Olive.'

Olive felt in her pocket, but it was not there, and she had no other suggestion to offer.

'There's not a drop of wine but what was in the decanters at dinner! Master is sure to be terrible cross about it! John is, I know. He says he would rather have forfeited a whole year's wages than have such a thing occur in any family where he happened to be living at the time. Where can that key have got to?'

Olive went down the back stairs, and by back ways to the dining-room. She was afraid of being seen by some of the gay guests whose voices were now resounding through the house. The dining-room was now the supper-room, and a well-filled table stretched from one end of it to the other. Olive, candle in hand, and aided by the maid, looked under it and all round, but no key was there; and when she stood up again, the brightly sparkling wine

glasses, which seemed destined to remain empty, mocked her by the prominent part which they played in the general effect. At one end of the long table was a prettily arranged group of primroses in tall glasses, and when she saw these she knew that, though her aunt might be careless about housekeeping matters, she had kindly remembered to put these treasures into water for her. They suggested a happy thought, and she suddenly exclaimed, 'Did Mrs. Brooke put these primroses in water? If she did, she may have thrown away the key with the broken flowers and bits of stalk.'

'Yes, she put them in the glasses, and she rolled all the rubbish and dead leaves and things in the paper the hamper was standing on, and stuffed it out of sight inside it.'

'Look there, then,' said Olive, who was anxious to avert from the house this signal disgrace. The girl snatched at the hope and ran away to look, and just as she had gone there was a loud peal at the bell. 'How late some of the people are in coming!' thought Olive, as she drew back within the shelter of the dining-room door. She heard some one with a very

sweet voice asking for Dr. Brooke, and piteously pleading to be allowed to see him for a moment, even if he had friends. John was stern. In his estimation, it enhanced the dignity of the family that he should be so. 'Let's them see that master is not short of patients,' was what he said, when alluding to his own peremptory and unconciliatory manner.

'He is from 'ome, ma'am ; one of his own young ladies who is at school at Brighton is not very well, and he has gone there to see her.' Olive had not heard of this reason for his absence before.

'When does he return ?' inquired the lady at the door, in great anxiety.

'Sometime to-night. It is uncertain,' said John, who could not be expected to have much feeling for a lady who had nothing better than a street-cab waiting for her at the door ; 'you had better call in the morning, between ten and one.'

'In the morning !' said the lady, in a voice so sad and yet so delightful that Olive wondered how John could have the heart to resist it. 'Oh, do let me wait here a few minutes. I am so anxious to see him, and he may come to-night.'

‘He could not go out again if he did, ma’am. He is not well himself. He never attends night cases.’

The lady said something of which Olive only heard the sound; that voice was somehow well known to her. She had not heard it for years, but there was something about it which she could never forget. She peeped out, and just within the doorway she saw the lady whom she used to know as Alice, but whom she now knew to be her mother’s sister. She was just saying, ‘Let me wait and ask him to go out myself—you don’t seem to think how important it is. It is a case of life or death.’

In a moment Olive went to the door, took the lady’s hand, led her into the consulting-room, made her sit down, and then flung herself on her knees before her, and cried, ‘Is it my mother who is ill?’

‘She is very ill,’ said Alice Ainsley, whose eyes were swimming with tears.

‘Not dying?’ said Olive, in an awe-struck voice.

‘I fear it. I have feared it all day. I came to Dr. Brooke as the last chance of saving her; if you had not come to me I should have lost it.’

‘Uncle will go to her the moment he returns. You will let me go too, won’t you?’ she added. ‘She is my mother.’

‘You know it, then?’ said Alice. ‘You have at last been told?’

‘I have been told. I know everything—more than anyone else, for I know what was said of her was false. I learnt that to-day, and have the proof of it in my pocket.’

Alice softly took Olive’s hand, and said, ‘If this could have happened before! Now, I fear it is too late—oh, how I wish your uncle would come!’

Olive went to the supper-room to see if John were there. He was now putting wine in abundance on the table. ‘John,’ said she, ‘when Dr. Brooke returns, ask him to come to me in the study at once. Don’t let him go upstairs, I mean—make him come to me.’

‘Bless you, Miss, do you know what o’clock it is? It is eleven, and he has been at ’ome an hour or more, and now that the cellar key has been found ’id in the ’amper, the first thing he’ll have to do will be to come down to supper.’

‘Oh no!’ cried Olive. ‘Don’t say that sup-

per is ready until he has got away with us, go upstairs and give him a note from me. Ask him to read it at once,' and she hastily took a scrap of paper and wrote, 'Come into the study the moment you receive this. It is most important that you should not delay.—OLIVE.' 'John, if you don't bring Dr. Brooke, I'll go to him myself.'

John went sulkily away, declaring to himself that it was 'quite hinfra dig. to stay in a place where such 'ole-in-a-corner goings on took place.' Olive clung to the doorway for support. Her uncle came immediately. 'Olive, my child, what ails you?' said he.

'My mother is ill, perhaps dying. Come to her.'

'Your mother is upstairs, and the gayest of the gay.'

'Not that creature!' said Olive, with a gesture of horror. 'My true mother, I mean. Come to her. You have been sent for.'

'Who has sent for me?' said Dr. Brooke, who was so startled that he was confused.

Olive pointed to the study. Dr. Brooke made a step forwards and met Alice.



‘Alice!’ he exclaimed. ‘You here?’

‘Richard, Dorothy is very ill—her life is in danger. My only hope is in you. Will you come to her?’

‘Of course I will,’ said he.

The cab which had brought Alice Ainsley was still waiting for her, and the three went forth into the darkness together.

## CHAPTER XXXVIII.

If it were now to die,  
'Twere now to be most happy ; for I fear  
My soul hath her content too absolute,  
That not another comfort like to this  
Succeeds in an unknown fate.—*Othello*.

O thou soft natural death, that art joint-twin  
To sweetest slumber.—*Vittoria Corombona*.

THE cab stopped at a house which, so far as Dr. Brooke could judge, was in the neighbourhood of Hampstead. 'I will go and prepare my sister for your visit,' said Alice, opening the door of a downstairs room. 'Will you wait here for a minute or two?' She left them alone, and then Olive whispered, 'Uncle, if you were to tell my mother that I have to-day seen a servant of hers who can prove that she was unjustly condemned, perhaps that might do her more good than anything else that could be done for her.'

'Is that true?' exclaimed Dr. Brooke, in startled surprise. 'I have always believed

there was something very wrong about that trial; but can it really be proved?’

‘It can. Perfectly proved.’

‘Did you say a servant of hers? One of the Deanhams, I suppose? Good-for-nothing women, they both were! Why couldn’t she speak out sooner?’

‘It is a long story. One of them was much more guilty than the other. She was paid by my stepmother to keep silence. That was at the time of the trial; but she has again had money from her, and is now in America; her sister is here, and has told me all. Everything can be proved. She has made a deposition before Mr. Ardrossan and Dr. Ullathorne. Besides, I have letters in my pocket which are proof enough without anything further.’

‘Thank God!’ cried Dr. Brooke fervently; and then in the very next breath he doubted the wisdom and justice of the God whom he was thanking, by saying, ‘How cruel if this has only come to light when it is too late to be of any comfort to your poor mother!’

‘Oh, it hasn’t,’ cried Olive hopefully. ‘It can’t have done that. Uncle, I may see her?’

‘Of course you may, but not yet. You heard what your aunt said on the way? She is suffering from heart-disease; we must not run any risk of doing her harm.’

A step was heard. Alice came softly in and said to Dr. Brooke, ‘She knows you are here, and is delighted.’

‘You did not tell her that her child was here too?’

‘No, I dared not. She is in such a very critical state, and the other doctor frightened me so.’

‘Excited?’ said Dr. Brooke.

‘Oh no, not at all excited; she is quite composed; but I am terribly afraid she is gradually sinking.’

‘Olive,’ said Dr. Brooke, ‘as soon as it is safe, she shall be told you are in the house. Stay here, dear child; one of us will soon come back to you.’

Olive heard them go upstairs, heard them moving in the room above her, and pictured the scene as they took their places by the bedside. . How she longed to be there too! and yet how she trembled at the thought of going!

Time passed. All was quiet, and she sat wondering how long it would be before some one would come and tell her that there was a hope that her mother's life might be spared. Was this to be the end of her own struggle to gain a knowledge which she had hoped would make her poor mother's last years so happy? Was there to be no quiet time when they two might dwell together in love and peace? It could not be possible that this was to be all. As her uncle had said, such a blow would be too cruel! Still Olive was left alone, but, though anxious beyond measure, she yet dared to rely on what seemed to her absolutely necessary to her sense of justice—her conviction that her mother would be spared to her for a few years longer.

At last Dr. Brooke came downstairs—he was alone. He walked slowly across the room to Olive. She never moved, but fixed her swimming eyes on his to read the sense of the words which she was about to hear. He took her hand, and said, 'I have given her something which has done her good—she looks so beautiful and happy.'

‘But will she get better?’

He shook his head. ‘When you see her, which will be very soon, I don’t think you will feel so unhappy about losing her. She has no wish to live.’

‘Won’t she wish to live when she knows she will have me with her?’

‘Dear Olive, her mind is not always in a sound state. She has suffered so much that it is now almost permanently unsettled. When she is not herself, she has fears and fancies, and is any thing but happy. You would be wretched if you saw her then.’

‘I would bear it. I could make my own happiness consist in watching over her.’

‘I know you could, but it would not be good for you, and I do not think that it is a thing to wish for. She has no fear of death. She knows that she could not have lived long, even if she had escaped her present illness; and now that the two things for which she has prayed for nearly twenty years have been granted her, she will feel still more at rest.’

Olive’s distress was so great that she could not speak. She turned her sorrowful eyes in-

quiringly on her uncle, who said, 'For years, whenever her mind was sane, she has prayed to be allowed to see you before she died—that was one wish ; the other was to know that when she was dead you would be able to respect her memory. Both these prayers have been granted.'

'But I had so hoped that we should live together !' sobbed Olive.

'Do not wish for it ; she is conscious of her mental affliction, and suffers great agony when she feels that another attack is coming on—she would have other attacks.'

Olive sighed heavily, and in that sigh renounced the future for which she had worked and hoped so long. What was best for her mother was what should be best for herself also. 'Have you told her that Mary Gardiner has confessed ?' said she.

'Yes ; she took the news calmly. She seems to have felt certain that the truth would at last be made known. You see, she knew her own innocence ; the shock came to her when it was doubted—not when it was established.'

'May I go to her ?'

‘Her sister is now talking to her about you—she means to offer to send for you. You must go into the room as if you had been brought from some little distance, and must on no account show much emotion.’

‘Oh, I can be quite calm,’ said Olive, grasping her uncle’s hand as she spoke, with a force which showed that she was struggling with the strongest excitement.

‘Remember that her life hangs by a thread.’

‘How long will she live?’ asked Olive, trying to be very brave.

‘Perhaps four or five hours—perhaps ten or twelve.’

‘Not more?’

‘No, not more.’

Olive was perfectly silent and still, but Dr. Brooke could see the intensity of her suffering. When at last she spoke, she said, ‘Do not be afraid to let me see her. I shall try to use well the short time which is left me.’

Dr. Brooke kissed her, and at the same moment saw Alice in the doorway. She had come to take Olive to her mother. ‘Remember!’ said he, and then she went. Her heart



beat almost audibly, but she walked steadily upstairs.

‘Your uncle has cautioned you?’ whispered Alice.

‘Yes; have no fear,’ was Olive’s answer, and in another minute the door was opened, and she could see into the room where the mother who had filled her entire mind ever since she had first heard of her existence was now lying at the point of death. A soft lamp-light filled the room, but Olive saw nothing but the bed and a figure whose outlines were lost in the shadow of a large white curtain. Alice led Olive across the room, made her sit down by the bed, and gently placed her hand in her mother’s. Olive was about to speak, and to speak impulsively, for this took her by surprise, but Alice put a finger on her lips and said, ‘Answer what she says, don’t speak.’

‘My darling, I have you at last!’ said her mother softly. ‘I always knew I should see you. When the doctor said I must die—not Richard Brooke; the other doctor, I mean—I was glad, for I knew for certain that, however soon death might come, you would come still sooner!’

‘She has always told me that,’ said Alice. ‘Nothing ever made her waver from that—she always declared that she was convinced she should see you before she went.’

‘Yes,’ said the sick woman; ‘but, Alice, don’t you talk—I have had you with me for years—I want to hear my child speak now. Say something, Olive.’

Olive tenderly clasped the hand which held hers and said, ‘May I not see you, mother? The curtain hides you from me. Do not think because I have been away from you all this time, that I have not loved you. I have loved you ever since I first discovered you were my mother.’

A delighted smile passed over Alice’s face as she stooped to kiss Olive for this speech, then she drew back the curtain, and Olive saw the well-remembered face. It was still beautiful and noble, but painfully thin and wan. She saw her mother’s burning brown eyes fixed on hers, and watched a happy smile as it flitted over her lips. Then she lay still, looking at Olive with perfect, but quiet happiness. Now that she had her child by her side, she wanted nothing more.

At last she said, 'Let me have a little more light, Alice ; I want to see her more clearly. Stand up, my child, and let me see you better.'

Alice lighted some candles and held them close to Olive. Most eagerly the poor mother strained her already somewhat dim eyes to scan every feature of that beloved face. 'You are very pretty, darling,' she murmured. 'I wonder whether I was ever at all like you ! I can hardly believe now that there ever was a time when I was young and happy.'

'I am not very happy, mother—' began Olive, but her aunt checked her. Her mother had not heard her words. 'My darling,' said she, 'I pray that your life may be happy. Never act in opposition to what your heart tells you is right. That is what I was made to do—that brought me to this ;' and she began to weep most piteously.

Olive stooped and kissed her, saying, 'I will always remember your words, mother.' Alice drew her gently back from her mother, who was embracing her convulsively, and would soon have been in a passion of grief and tears.

‘Don’t speak for a while,’ said Alice; ‘your mother must rest. She is too weak to talk any more just yet.’

‘Weak! when I have my child with me! The sight of her has made me strong. I feel quite a different woman! Besides, there are some things which must be spoken. Olive, you said a few minutes since that you had loved me ever since you heard of my existence—then, the person who told you of that did not tell you of the dreadful accusation which had been brought against me?’

‘Yes, she did!’ exclaimed Olive, with a vehemence which she regretted immediately; ‘but, mother, as soon as I recollected that if I had a mother she must be that lady whom I had once seen, I did not believe what she said. You know I saw you when you came to the window in Kensington Square—I saw your face then, and knew what this wicked woman said must be false.’

Alice again laid a warning hand on Olive’s shoulder.

‘Be quiet, Alice,’ cried the poor mother. ‘You think that I shall excite myself; you

forget how good it is for me to hear what she is saying ! You trusted me, my darling ; tell me so again.'

'I did. I never once doubted you after I had recovered the shock sufficiently to be able to think.'

A perfectly radiant smile illuminated the poor mother's face, and for some time she lay quite still, enraptured with Olive's words. At last she said, 'What you tell me, dear, makes me so happy that it seems to repay me for all that I have gone through ; say it again. You are sure you did not doubt me?'

'I am quite sure.'

'Your father did,' said she in a voice of intense pain. 'He doubted me, and he knew me better than you did ; that was what hurt me so cruelly ; I had never once deceived him ; no, not in the smallest matter.'

'Mother, he was not with you ; he was deceived by those two wicked women.'

She was about to say something in answer to this, but Alice interrupted her and turned her thoughts in another direction by saying,

‘Dorothy, think of your child, how delightful it is to know that she trusted you.’

She pressed Olive’s hand. ‘My child,’ said she, ‘you are with me at last! I have suffered agonies from the fear that, if ever I did meet you face to face, you would turn away from me. You were torn from me before you could even speak plainly! I could have borne everything if they had left me my child. There is no justice in laws which allow a mother to be deprived of a child whom she loves.’

‘Don’t think of that,’ said Olive. ‘Mother, I should never have turned away from you! I remember so well, when I saw you, how your face attracted me! I thought of you for months, and longed to see you again.’

‘I saw *her*, standing by your side! *She* might be with you, but not I! *She* was always there to tell you I was a wretch unworthy of your love,’ cried Dorothy Brooke wildly.

‘Don’t speak of her! Don’t think of her! You have heard that her falsehood can be proved; that the evidence is in our hands?’

‘It must never be used,’ said her mother. ‘No one must ever know what Mary Deanham

has told you. They thought me shameless and wicked when I was alive and their opinion could hurt me; let them think of me as they will when I am dead and gone.'

'But my father must know!' said Olive.

'No, Olive, no! Your father must never be told. He failed me when he ought to have trusted me. I was tried and condemned when I was just recovering from a long illness. You don't know all that I had to bear. I was ill in body and mind after my dear brother's terrible death, but I was recovering, and was nearly myself again, when this trial came, and the sentence was given against me. That drove me quite mad—that, and their taking you away from me! No, your father believed the worst then, and made me lose my reason. I do not wish him ever to hear my name again!'

'But those who are most guilty—the women who lied to him—cannot be punished without his knowing.'

'Leave them unpunished. Let your father end his days believing what he believes now—I do not wish him to suffer any pain which I can spare him.'

‘Mother, I am thinking of you! It is a duty to see that the injustice which has been done you is made known.’

‘It is a duty which I will have left undone. I have learnt what suffering and sorrow are—I have no pity for the woman who ruined my happiness, but I have for my husband and for his children. They are innocent. If the shame is removed from me, it will fall with tenfold strength on them. Olive, my poor life is over: can you bear to live and let its sad story be told by them as they will?’

‘I can do so, of course, but it would be very wrong if I did.’

‘Not wrong, if I wish it. Let your father die in peace. Let his children live without despising and hating their mother—let their wretched mother go her way. Your uncle will be your father, I hope, and his house your home. You will marry some day, dear. Tell your husband my unhappy story. Show him Hannah Deanham’s letters. Then, if he insists on having this made public, obey him; but if possible, let it be buried with me.’

‘Mother, you are very noble and forgiving!’



‘Oh no, I do not wish your father and those poor children of his to go through life branded with——’

‘My dear friend, you are talking far too much,’ said Dr. Brooke, who, unperceived by all, had entered the room and joined the group by the bedside.

‘I will talk no more ; but, Olive, you must give me that promise.’

‘I do promise,’ said Olive. ‘Mother, you may trust me.’

‘Richard,’ said the sick woman, ‘do not look so grave. No one was ever hurt by too much happiness ! I am no worse than I was.’

He was feeling her thin thread of pulse, and thinking that it would be very difficult for anyone to be much worse. She was only kept alive at all by her joy in the sight of her child. ‘You must at any rate rest a little while,’ said he. ‘Listen to this one thing which I wish to say to you, Dorothy, and then rest in silence. I want you to know that this dear child of yours is dear to me also. She has been to me as my own child ever since she was taken from your keeping. For your sake I should have

done everything in my power to make her happy, but, besides that, my wife and I love her for herself.' Olive's hand, which he had drawn away from her mother's, softly stole to his as she heard these words. He continued, 'Have no anxiety about her future—her home is with us. We thought it right to yield her up to the care of her stepmother on her father's demand. Henceforth we recognise no authority but yours—if you give her to us, she is ours.'

'Richard,' said a faint voice from the bed, 'you know how to make a poor mother close her eyes in peace. I do give her to you.'

'Olive,' said Dr. Brooke, 'kiss your mother and come with me downstairs. Don't be afraid, Dorothy; neither she nor I will leave you.' He drew Olive gently away. 'It must be,' said he, and then he added apologetically, 'only for half an hour or so: she shall come back to you then.'

He made Olive rest on the sofa, he sat down near her, and never had she seen him so full of thought. After some time he crept quietly upstairs; his patient was asleep. He

told Olive this, and added, 'Your poor aunt has been sitting up every night for a fortnight!'

'May I go and sit with my mother and let my aunt have some sleep?'

'Better not,' said Dr. Brooke, gravely, and Olive felt that he said so because he knew that the weary watcher's labours would soon be ended. After a while he himself fell asleep. How grey and anxious his face looked, but how noble its beauty was! Olive watched him uneasily for some time. She feared that he was not strong enough to bear such a fatiguing day as this without injury. He might have slept for an hour or more, when she heard a slight sound upstairs. Her heart sickened with fear. Had death, the dread visitor whom her uncle seemed to look for with such certainty, actually come? So far as she herself could judge, there seemed to be no reason why her mother should not live for weeks. Her voice was strong, her eyes were bright, her mind was clear, and yet Dr. Brooke had never wavered, but had said she must die in an hour or two. She again heard steps and sounds in

the room above. She could not bear the suspense any longer. She had not the heart to disturb her uncle, but stole noiselessly upstairs, and opened her mother's door. Alice was sitting by the bed where Olive had sat before. She was reading aloud to her sister, and her voice was firm and unfaltering. The sick woman was lying perfectly still, with an expression of the most complete contentment on her face; her eyes were calmly fixed on the reader: she seemed to be entirely engrossed by what she was listening to. Olive went nearer to the bed. Her mother just smiled at her and murmured, 'I have asked your aunt to read that beautiful service to me—I thought I should like to hear it. Sit down and listen too, darling—that is, unless you would prefer to read, instead of listening.'

Olive felt a large lump rise in her throat—it seemed almost to choke her. Not being able to speak, she shook her head emphatically; she could not have read those words to her own dying mother even though they conveyed, in the words of an Apostle, the Divine assurance of a Love which would conquer death and of a Life which was beyond the grave.

‘Then go on, Alice dear,’ said Dorothy Brooke gently; ‘oh, stay; sit a little on one side, and let me have my darling child close to me.’

Alice gave a chair to Olive, took another, and then went on reading. The extreme beauty and solemnity of the words which she heard touched Olive with awe, but the horror of hearing her mother spoken of as one who was dead already, told on her with such force that she could neither look up nor move. All her strength had to be given to self-restraint. Each moment she felt as if she must scream aloud, or sob, while in reality she must not even suffer the hand which was now holding her mother’s to tremble, or twitch, or show any sign of strong emotion, lest she should do her harm. Each moment she felt as if she could bear this strain no longer, but must clutch the hand she held and cry, ‘No! Do not listen to that terrible reading! Do not die! Stay with me, mother, do!’ And still the reading went on, and Alice’s sweet sad voice made it all the more hard to bear. After a while she read some chapters from St. John’s Gospel, and these had the effect of tranquillizing the poor girl who was listening. As Alice read, Olive became calmer, and

gradually her heart became attuned to a noble renunciation of her own selfish wishes and submission to God's will.

Her mother lay quite still. She had never uttered one word except a murmured assent when Alice had once said, 'Shall I go on reading, dear?' Once she herself had grasped Olive's hand with a sudden convulsive force, but now for a long time the reading had been uninterrupted.

'She is asleep,' said Olive at length, fearing that Alice was taxing her strength too much by reading so long.

'That's a good thing,' replied Alice; 'but I think I had better go on. Sometimes people miss the voice which has sent them to sleep, and waken up directly it stops.' So she read a while longer, and then closed her book and sat in silence. This made no difference to the sleeper, whose head lay peacefully on the pillow, and whose lips were parted in a happy half-smile. Gradually the faint daylight came stealing in, and turned the mellow lamp-light into a chill cold grey. And still these two sat by the bedside, fearing to move or speak or

make any sound: Alice with her handsome face white and worn with fatigue, but with her eyes resting lovingly on Olive, and Olive with her head bent down. More light came, and soon the life of the street began. These two anxious women had for many hours forgotten that the world had any other inhabitants than those who were now assembled together in that one room.

‘Had we not better put some more clothes on the bed?’ whispered Olive. ‘I think we ought; her hand begins to feel very chilly.’

A look of fear came into Alice’s eyes—she softly drew back the curtain which hid her sister from her sight. She felt her hand and her forehead, and started back. Her sister was dead. That one sudden and eager pressure of the hand which Olive had felt such a long time before, was her mother’s last farewell!

## CHAPTER XXXIX.

*Ros.* Oh, how full of briars is this working-day world !

*As You Like It.*

WHAT would become of all the exhibitions which contribute to make the month of May such a pleasure and such a toil, if artists still adhered to the pious old custom of steeping their brushes in holy water all through Lent ? Lent is the very busiest season of the artistic year ; and if the painters' faces are pale, it is not with fasting, but with hard work ; or if they do fast, it is because they can barely spare time to snatch a mouthful of food. Those who are familiar with the secret history of many of the most admired pictures can tell of the hairbreadth escapes from total ruin they have more than once undergone : how, on the very last day before 'sending in,' Brown



painted out the face of his principal figure—the agonized heroine of the last new heart-rending farewell scene—and how he had to sit up the whole night to put her in again, with deeper throes of anguish, and a better-painted complexion; while Jones performed the friendly office of dabbing in a background for him; and Thompson tore the picture from them at last, and carried it down to Burlington House on the top of a common street-cab, just in time for the final skirmish of porters.

All over London, men were toiling and half-killing themselves with excitement as the fatal day for ‘sending in’ drew nearer. Morrison was as busy and as anxious as the rest. The winter had been dark and foggy, and his mind had been too unsettled for work. He was trying to finish his big picture and another from Rastwick Nab, and for once was grateful when Ambergreen, who always had plenty of time at his disposal, came idly in with ample leisure to criticise. He laughed at Morrison’s nervousness and said, ‘I never get into such a state about my pictures as you seem to do—not a bit of it. When I have finished a thing,

it is finished, and I put it on one side and trouble myself no more about it.'

'But my things never do seem quite right, and I can't help working at them so long as I see I can make them better.'

'More's the pity, both for them and you! What a fortune you might make, Morrison, if you would learn to let well alone, and if you would but addict yourself entirely to sunsets! No one can touch you when it comes to putting a fine sunset on the canvas. I can't think how you contrive to do it. It's not as if you were a poetical fellow.'

Morrison declined this provocation to an argument, and said meekly, 'I don't think I *do* do it. How I wish the splendid picture one wants to paint would let itself be done! I sometimes feel as if at length I was going to do something a little more like the thing I am trying for than usual, and then nothing comes of it. That way a picture has of turning out, at the last, just like every other picture, is one of the cruellest things in art.

'Nonsense! You are no judge of your own work. Besides, after all, look how you

are getting on! No young fellow of my acquaintance is half so well thought of. Why, whose work is this?' And as Ambergreen spoke he took up a little drawing of the harbour at St. Hilda's, by Rosamond Keithley—the very picture she was painting when Morison first saw her.

'Oh, that's a lady's work. What do you think of it? Tell me, and then I will tell you something.'

'That you are engaged to her, I suppose?' said Ambergreen coolly, not for one moment imagining that there could be a word of truth in his assertion, for he looked on getting married as throwing away every prospect of advancement, worldly and intellectual, and could not believe that his friend would be so foolish. 'She can draw,' said Ambergreen.

'Yes, and I am engaged to her. If you wait a little longer you will see her. She is coming here to try to finish that for the Ellesmere. I have persuaded her to send in.'

'There is some very good work in it. But I would not marry her if I were you. I should always imagine her intentions were not honour-

able. I mean, she is probably much more fond of drawing than of anything else, and is only marrying you because you can help her to get on. That's it you may be sure. You smile as if you felt quite safe, but you may depend on it that is her reason. I wish you would not marry her—I hate my friends marrying; and now there's you, and Miss Brooke, and Mr. Ardrossan—three of you—at one go!

‘Miss Brooke! Is she going to be married? But to whom?’

‘To Mr. Ardrossan, of course; so there's no more picture-buying to be looked for from him. I should not have minded marrying Miss Brooke myself; that is, if ever I could bring myself to marry anybody. I used to think she did rather like me; but then, you see, that aunt looked such a dragon that I never dared to flirt at all.’

‘Is she really going to marry Mr. Ardrossan?’ inquired Morrison.

‘Yes, really—at least, I am told so. I wish she was not, don't you? Good-bye. Be happy about your pictures. They are sure to be great successes. I never saw such a lucky

young fellow as you are. Everything goes right with you. You will pass through life without knowing what disappointment is! At least, it looks like it. Good-bye again.'

Morrison turned aside to hide his face, which, as he well knew, wore an expression somewhat at variance with this statement. The pang he felt on hearing Ambergreen's news was not long-lived. He was not quite cured of his love for Olive—he wondered sometimes whether he ever should be—but he had a very sincere affection for Rose Keithley, and in half an hour she and her aunt, Mrs. Ullathorne, would be with him.

Dr. Ullathorne, at the East End, had a very comfortable house, but there was scarcely a room in it which he could call his own. All day long it was besieged by people who 'just wanted to speak to him for five minutes.' It was astounding how many there were in his parish who were in need of money and advice, and time to state their wishes; and each person's necessity was still more pressing than that of the one who had gone before him. One room, easy of access from the door, was set

apart for these visitors, but it frequently overflowed all over the house, and no room could be pronounced absolutely safe from intrusion, not even a poor shabby little old nursery where Rosamond Keithley, now on a visit to the good Rector of St. Dionysius's, had of late set up her easel, in the vain hope of quiet. Morrison had seen her futile attempts to secure a corner to work in, and had invited her to come and paint in his studio ; and while Ambergreen was talking to him she was on her way there. To-day her companion was not Mrs. Ullathorne, but Miss Lettice Brooke, who had come from Austerfield to pay a visit in Sussex, and was spending a week in Kensington Square to break the journey. Poor lady, old as she was, she found her sister Mary still treated her as a baby, and was not sorry when the Bethnal Green Ullathornes made her go there for a couple of days. This morning she was in a flutter of excitement at being asked to go with Rose Keithley to Mr. Morrison's studio. 'You are sure it is right?' she asked. 'I want to go, of course, but I don't want to do anything very wrong.'

‘How can it be very wrong? It is not wrong at all.’

‘Well, my dear, you know him, and I will do as you like, but they do tell such stories of artists and their goings-on. They are most of them very wicked, I fancy; but I’ll go if you wish it. You say you want Mr. Morrison’s advice about your picture. It does seem so funny to think of his growing up to be an authority on any subject! I remember him quite a little boy, with no sense whatever, except what my niece Olive put into his head.’

‘That must have been a very long time ago,’ cried Rosamond, full of dutiful respect for her lover’s intellect.

‘Well, it was. I don’t know that he was stupider than other boys—they are all stupid—but still I do think he was a particularly dull boy. Not that I ever said much to him.’

‘Then how do you know he was so dull?’ said Rose, much piqued. But Miss Lettice was quite unaware that she was saying anything wrong.

‘I’m sure I don’t know how I do know, my memory is so bad; but I am certain he was dull.’

Rose laughed merrily, and said, 'At any rate, he is not dull now. He is so clever and interesting. He will like to see you. He has talked to me about Austerfield.'

'I can't think what he finds to admire in the place, or what Olive does either—I expect they liked it because they had all their own way when they were there.'

'He has never mentioned your niece Olive to me,' said Rose. 'Was he much at your house?'

'At *our* house!' gasped Miss Lettice, who, being country-bred, was a great stickler for the due observance of divinely-appointed divisions of classes. 'No, he never entered *our* doors; but he was a good-looking, well-behaved little fellow, and somehow or other Olive and he were always together.'

'How old were they then?' asked Rosamond, with one faint tremor of uneasiness.

'Oh, babies; children, at any rate. It is years ago now. I don't suppose he even remembers her name. She thinks he does, but I dare say he has forgotten he ever saw her.'

'Here we are!' said Rosamond.



Miss Lettice puckered up her lips in surprise. She had not expected to find Mr. Morrison in such good quarters. In her estimation the tasteless decorations with which the architect had enlivened the exterior of the house denoted circumstances of ease, if not of splendour.

‘I won’t tell him your name. Let us see if he remembers you.’

‘I bring with me an old acquaintance of yours,’ said Rose, who had not the slightest conception of the heights from which Miss Lettice had looked down on ‘Willie,’ together with all the other ‘village people.’ ‘Can you guess who it is?’

Morrison looked at the handsome old lady, who, dressed in her pretty maidenly greys, now stood smiling so benevolently on him. ‘Of course I can,’ he cried warmly. ‘Do you think I could ever forget an Austerfield face? It is Miss Lettice Brooke.’

‘You really remember me! You have not seen me for nearly a dozen years!’ cried Miss Lettice; and then, tactless as usual, she exclaimed, ‘My dear Rosamond, if I were you I

should be jealous of those very vivid recollections of Mr. Morrison's. My niece Olive is just the same. Whenever she sees me she quite tears me down with questions about a hundred different things at Austerfield that I have no interest in.'

Morrison looked up eagerly. Miss Lettice continued: 'Now, in reality, it is as poor a place as you could wish to see. There's not a decent house in the whole village, except our own and the clergyman's—all the rest are mere shabby little cottages.'

Rose Keithley, who knew that Morrison had lived there, and that his origin had been rather humble, blushed deeply at this, and looked pleadingly at Miss Lettice, who ran on with great composure and velocity for some minutes longer in the same strain.

'We must not talk,' interposed Rosamond, taking off her bonnet and retreating to a distant table. 'I am only allowed to come here on condition that I don't speak.' 'That's what I call a particularly plain hint,' thought she: 'almost too plain.'

But Miss Lettice only said, 'Quite right.'

Of course work must be paramount here, and I am not much of a talker.'

'Will you have a book, Miss Lettice?' said Rose, full of pity for Morrison. 'Do let me get you a book.'

'Yes, you may give me a book, but I am not much of a reader. You see, I forget what I have read ten minutes after I have shut the book; so what's the use of my reading? No, I'll sit here and think. I won't speak, Mr. Morrison. Don't be afraid; I quite know the importance of silence.' There was a second's pause, and then she added, 'You see, I sometimes stay with my sister-in-law in Harley Street, and when I am there she occasionally, as a great favour, lets me sit with her in her study when she is writing, and that makes me know so well how important it is to be absolutely quiet and silent when in the company of anyone who is doing head-work. She is dreadfully particular—she won't be disturbed. When you are with her you must not move or speak, or read a newspaper, or do almost anything. You see it won't do to be noisy, for she is thinking hard all the time. I am sure it is

very good of her to sit working away so patiently for so many hours, all for the sake of writing books that one forgets ten minutes after one has read them. Now, isn't it, Mr. Morrison, very good?'

He made a civil speech, and she responded by another; after which, having been silent for five minutes, she said, 'I think you have been at Austerfield lately, Mr. Morrison?'

'Yes, I went over from St. Hilda's—I had a fancy to see the old place again.'

'I heard you had been there. It was so odd, too,—I went to see my brother in Harley Street the other day—just to spend the day, you know, for my real visit there is to be paid when I return from Sussex—that will be in about three weeks' time, for I go there to-morrow, and am to stay three weeks. Well, I went to my brother Richard's house, and I found my niece Miss Olive very ill—altogether ill, and out of spirits. I don't know what had happened to her, or whether anything had happened, but she looked pale and thin and unhappy, and was sitting in her own room painting a few twigs of some bush or other—

ugly things they were, I assure you, Mr. Morrison—and I said to her, “Olive, why don’t you get some pretty flowers, or fruit, or something from Covent Garden to copy? What’s the use of wasting your time on such common rubbish as that, when Covent Garden is so near?” And she said, “Don’t be so disrespectful to flowers from your own native place;” and I cried out, “My own native place! How did they come here?” And she asked me if I had heard of your being there, and said she was sure you had been, for some one had sent her a whole hamperful of wild flowers, and she felt certain that it could have been no one but you; so I said you had been there, for, you see, just by accident I had heard of your sleeping one night at “The Four Alls,” and that made me able to tell her; and you can’t think how delighted she looked when she found she had guessed right.’

Morrison bent his head down over his picture. He did not answer this long speech. He dared not speak—he scarcely dared to think. Rose glanced at him, wondering whether Miss Lettice’s talk was irritating him beyond endur-

ance, or whether his emotion was caused by something else. What could it mean?

Miss Lettice did not notice anything—not even that no one had replied to her speech. Rose saw her beginning to speak again, and trembled. It was terrible that Morrison should be so disturbed when each moment was so precious! She would go—she wished she had not come—it was too cruel that he should be thus tormented by Miss Lettice on the very eve of ‘sending in.’

‘You have not seen my niece, I think, since you were both children?’ persisted the unconscious Miss Lettice. She thought she was behaving like a kind Christian gentlewoman by being so ready to meet Morrison on terms of equality and talk to him so freely.

‘Oh, yes, I have; I saw her in Scotland in October, and I met her at a party in Harley Street on the 6th of February.’

‘Dear me!’ exclaimed Miss Lettice, ‘what a memory you have for dates; I wish I had, I am sure. Can you remember the dates of your parties as well as that, Rose?’

Rose Keithley started and did some injury

to her drawing, for the 6th of February was the evening which Morrison had promised to spend in her company, and he had broken that engagement, apparently for the sake of seeing Miss Olive Brooke. 'What have I done?' she cried, noticing that she had dropped a brush-full of colour on a delicate part of her sky.

'Take care, Rose,' said Morrison, who was quick to hear her low cry of distress and go to the rescue. 'Be cautious how you work, dear; you have no time now for anything but very careful finishing touches.' His voice was so kind and his offered assistance so prompt, that his Rose took heart again and looked lovingly in his face.

'Don't forget my song,' cried he. His song was a wicked parody on a very pretty poem of George Macdonald's :—

Alas ! how easily things go wrong !  
A touch too much, or a tint too strong,  
And there follows a mess and no end of pain,  
And the drawing is never the same again !

He soon repaired the damage and went back to his work, but Rose soon found herself thinking of the real last line of this verse, 'And

life is never the same again !' She could not drive it out of her mind. Suppose one of those little things which make all go wrong so easily, had happened now ?

Miss Lettice did not leave her much time for thought—she very soon exclaimed, ' Mr. Morrison, I wonder you do not go often to my sister-in-law's Tuesday evening parties ; she is fond of artists and authors, and would be delighted to see you.'

' Thank you, I go out so little,' he replied, and again became thoughtful, for she had reminded him of his last Tuesday evening in Harley Street. Finding everyone so unsociable, Miss Lettice began to read, and was actually silent for nearly an hour. Morrison painted, but his mind was in a turmoil. Miss Lettice's stray words stirred up so many thoughts of all kinds. Ambergreen said Olive was engaged to Mr. Ardrossan ! Miss Lettice said she was eager for news of Austerfield and delighted with his flowers. Did she care for him a little ? She could scarcely think of Austerfield without thinking of him at the same time. She certainly thought of Austerfield. But what did it signify



what her thoughts were, when she was engaged to Mr. Ardrossan and he to Rosamond Keithley? But was she engaged to Mr. Ardrossan? He turned to Miss Lettice, and said, 'I hear that Miss Olive Brooke is engaged to Mr. Ardrossan—I hope I do not take a liberty in speaking of it, and congratulating you.'

'Engaged to Mr. Ardrossan—indeed she is not!' cried Miss Lettice, who considered Olive nearly twenty years too young to think of marrying. 'I am certain she is not. I should have been informed of it if she were.'

Morrison drew a long breath of relief, and then his eye fell on Rosamond Keithley's dutiful head, which was bent down over her work. He saw, by a tinge of deeper colour in her cheek than was usual, that she was either anxious about what she was doing or something else, and hastily went to her side and whispered, 'Is there anything I can do for you, dear? Don't forget that I take quite as much interest in your work now as in my own.'

On this she looked so happy that he could not but be happy too.

'Remember me kindly to Miss Olive Brooke

when you see her,' said he when he bade Miss Lettice good-bye.

'Oh, but I am afraid I shall not see her until I return from Sussex.'

'Then when you write to her, perhaps.'

'I am not much of a writer,' said she. 'I don't suppose I shall have any opportunity of giving your message for three weeks—you know I stay three weeks in Sussex—I told you.'

'Yes, I know, but my message is of no consequence whatever.'

## CHAPTER XL.

We lose a life in every friend we lose,  
And every death is painful but the last.—LANDOR.

It was a dull and dismal afternoon. The air was laden with moisture, which fell in almost imperceptibly fine rain. The streets were muddy and wretched-looking. Olive was in her room dressing to go to her mother's funeral. Much as she dreaded the pain of witnessing such a ceremony, it would have hurt her still more to stay away. Her heart swelled when she thought how small would be the number of those who would care to be present. Her mother had expressed a wish that she should wear no mourning, but on this one day she felt she must put on a black dress. Dr. Brooke was to be there, and Alice, and, as Olive believed, no one else ; but when she went downstairs her aunt came forward and said, ' Dear child, I am

going with you.' This mark of kindness touched Olive deeply—there was sacrifice as well as love in it.

'Your Aunt Alice will go with us,' said Dr. Brooke. 'We must call for her.'

'How beautiful she is!' whispered Mrs. Brooke when she saw Alice Ainsley slowly walking down the narrow strip of garden. 'She has just the most beautiful kind of a face a woman can have. Don't you think so, Richard?'

'I don't know, I am sure, dear,' he said absently.

Arrived at the Cemetery, the scanty band of mourners arranged themselves and followed the coffin to the grave. Olive felt in a waking dream. She kept repeating to herself her mother's words as transmitted by Alice: 'Tell my dear Olive not to grieve over my death. Make her understand how I long for rest. Tell her that I shall perhaps be more with her now than I have ever been before, and that she must not pain me by the sight of any sorrow.' Olive felt as if she were under an obligation to shed no tears and think no repining thoughts. She had

brought with her all her Austerfield primroses—they were fresh and bright as ever. She liked the idea of placing these, which to her mind were the most precious flowers she could procure, in her mother's grave. When the service was over she laid them on the coffin, and then caught hold of her uncle's arm and said, 'Now, take me away.' But just as he was leading her away, she turned and saw Alice Ainsley standing gazing into the grave with a look in her face which plainly revealed that she was feeling that she had nothing left to live for. Ever since her girlhood Alice had lived for one object only. She had entirely devoted herself to the care of the sister who during all this time had been so dependent on her, but who now needed no more help from anyone. Whither was she now to turn? Who needed her love or care? Where was she to look for companionship? Olive saw the sense of desolation which was overmastering her, and stole gently to her side, slipped her hand in hers, and said, 'Aunt Alice, love me a little, and let me be with you sometimes. May I go home with you to-day?'

A pleased smile broke over Alice's face; she kept Olive's hand in hers, and they all left the Cemetery. Silently they seated themselves in the carriage, and now with one consent all the party looked at Alice as the one who most needed pity. She was quite unaware of their gaze. She sat looking out of the window and very full of thought. Just as they were approaching the house where she was living she turned to the Doctor and exclaimed, 'Richard—I beg your pardon—Dr. Brooke, how very pale you are!'

'It is nothing,' said Mrs. Brooke. 'He is a little tired. He often looks like that now—he has not recovered his long illness.'

'You have been ill?' said Alice—the deepest concern overspread her face, and for the first time she looked at him with undivided attention.

'Oh, no, I am quite well,' said he. He disliked to have anything said about his health.

'Pray take care of yourself,' said Alice earnestly, and then no more was said until the carriage stopped at her door.

'Olive says she will stay with me till the

evening,' said she. 'It is very kind of her.' I have a great many things to arrange, and she will help me. I hardly know what to do with myself—I think I shall go abroad.'

Dr. Brooke seemed uneasy, and said, 'Whatever you decide on, Alice, I hope you understand that you have friends in Harley Street who will be glad to be of service to you.'

'Yes, do understand that, dear,' cried Mrs. Brooke with a warmth which surprised her husband. 'I will come to see you in the morning—if I may?'

'In the morning!' His wife, who was so tenacious of her time during the morning, was offering to pay this early visit! Dr. Brooke looked at Selina in amazement. She was now saying to Alice, 'Do not make any very decided arrangements about the future until I have seen you—please do not, for I have something to propose to you.'

'She surely does not imagine that Alice is very poor, and wants to engage her as amanuensis?' thought he.

He was still more surprised in the evening, for Selina was dressed for dinner and in the

drawing-room even before the gong sounded. Such a thing had not happened for years. A smile passed over his face when he saw her, but it was not so much in commendation of her punctuality as because something in her manner pleased him so much. He could not help thinking of the time when he first knew her—when she was a girl in her own home—and all through dinner he was struck by her gentle thoughtfulness.

After tea he usually depended on an easy-chair and an amusing book for the comfort of his evening, for, though Mrs. Brooke's day's work was nominally ended at seven, she invariably stole away to dwell in fond criticism on the inky pages produced in the morning. This evening he established himself in a corner as usual ; but, happening after a while to look up, he was surprised to find he was not alone—his wife was sitting staring into the fire with folded hands and very earnest eyes. 'I thought you had gone off to your work,' said he.

'I am never going to write again,' she replied sadly.



‘Oh, poor wife, you have had a bad review! Don’t let that vex you too much.’

She shook her head. ‘It’s a great deal worse than that. In fact, the reviews one gives oneself always are worse than those one gets from other people. Richard, I have been a very bad wife to you.’

‘My dear Selina, no. I can’t let you say that.’

‘Yes, I have, and you have been so good and kind and patient! I am ashamed to think of it.’

‘Think of what? What can you mean?’

‘Of your forbearance—of how I must have tried you.’

‘What can make you talk in this way, Selina? I am not making any complaint. It is the very last thing I had it in my mind to do to-night.’

‘But I am making a complaint against myself. I seem all at once to see how much you have had to bear, Richard. I have tried you to the uttermost, I know, and under the circumstances I can’t imagine how you have borne it so well.’

‘My dear Selina, you are distressing yourself without a cause. What can you be thinking of? “Under the circumstances”—under what circumstances?’ And the Doctor looked as he felt—honestly puzzled.

‘I’ll tell you what I mean. Perhaps the only good you have ever got from my writing novels has come to you to-day. My novel-writing has made me understand something which I should never have understood without it. Richard, I was not your first love; I thought I was—until this morning. Your first love was Alice Ainsley. Don’t interrupt me. Let me tell you the story as I imagine it—you shall tell me if I am right. Richard, my dear husband, if I did not love you with all my heart—if I did not know you loved me, and feel grateful to you for doing so, and trust in you entirely, I could not speak to you as I am doing now.’

They were now sitting side by side. He took her hand in his and waited to hear what she wished to say. ‘Richard, dear, I saw it all this morning. Chesterfield married Dorothy Ainsley—you were engaged to Alice. If

Dorothy was as beautiful and noble-looking a woman as Alice is, it must have been hard to find two such sisters anywhere. Chesterfield's trouble brought on your trouble—that's how I imagine it all—and when he divorced his poor wife, your engagement with Alice was broken off too. I see it all. She would not marry into a family which had treated her sister so ill—or she wished to devote herself to her, or you did not uphold Dorothy's innocence heartily enough—there are so many ways in which it might have happened. It is painful to think of it, but have I not guessed the truth ?'

'Yes,' said he, 'you have. Alice and I were to have been married. No time was fixed, for I had my way to make, but we were engaged, and then that miserable trial came, and everything was at an end between us.'

'I can't think how you could ever care for me after having been engaged to Alice. You did love me, I think, but she is so superior—she is one in a thousand.'

'So are you. I loved her most truly ; but, Selina, I loved you too, and, dear, need I say that I love you still ?'

Mrs. Brooke had never been so happy in her life. 'In spite of all I have done to make you unhap—no, uncomfortable?'

What is that? Of course I love you. I may sometimes have wished you would give more of your time to your house and children, but I have never ceased to feel that you were a high-minded, noble woman. There is no smallness of mind in you, Selina.'

'I hope not,' replied Mrs. Brooke humbly. She was afraid she did not quite deserve this high praise.

'I am sure of it. To-day in the Cemetery you somehow or other guessed that there had been a time when poor Alice Ainsley was more to me than anyone else in the world, and you at once became doubly kind to her.'

'How could I be otherwise? I felt she was a thousand times more worthy of you than I. I looked at you both, and thought how you must have suffered. I was ashamed when I saw how little I had done to make you happy with me. Richard, I will never write another page. We will have the children home—it is

time they left school. Let us have them with us and be happy together.'

'We will have them back,' said Dr. Brooke ; 'but as to your giving up your writing, I exact no such sacrifice. Do it at stated times ; don't give it up altogether.'

'We will think about that—you know I am not one of those who think that the half is better than the whole. Besides, I want to please you.'

'To please me, dear? Don't class me with those who maintain that a woman ought to have no higher ambition than to make her husband comfortable.'

'Oh, no !' cried Mrs. Brooke ; and then she bethought herself and added, 'At least, I don't know—perhaps I ought to say that that was just what I did imagine you always felt ought to be the object of my life.'

'My dear wife, you have lived with me all these years, and don't know me better than that ! No one likes to see women take a high place in the world better than I do, but not at the expense of plain duties. People must be faithful over the little things which are com-

mitted to their charge before they even attempt to meddle with great ones.'

'But I always hoped to earn so much money by writing that I could pay for having everything done for you in a way far superior to anything I could have done. And after all I have never made any money worth mentioning. I suppose the fact is my books are not clever.' And the poor lady sighed. 'Well,' she added, 'you have been very good to me, Richard, and I am going to write no more—that is, unless this present book is so successful that it really looks as if I ought to go on. There is the bell. It is Olive. Let us finish this conversation before she comes. Richard, I want to ask you if I may invite Alice Ainsley to come and stay with us—live with us, if she likes—she is terribly alone?'

'You are too good, Selina. Do as you think best.'

The bell did not announce Olive's arrival, but that of a letter for Dr. Brooke. He read it with a curious smile on his face; then without speaking thrust it into his pocket—he had not the heart to tell his wife its contents that night,

but perhaps it is not quite fair to withhold them from our readers. It was a note from Mrs. Ullathorne, and began thus :—

RICHARD BROOKE,—I have to-day read your wife's novel. You may tell her so, and that I recognise my own portrait, and am extremely grateful to her for the pains which she has bestowed on it. You may also inform her that before I went abroad last year I made my will, and as you and she have never worried me with your attentions, I left 20,000*l.* to you, the same sum to her, and 10,000*l.* to each of your children ; but as I find you have a wife so richly endowed with genius that she will have no difficulty in providing for your family without any assistance from me, I have burnt that will, and shall make a new one to-morrow morning, in which this very unnecessary bequest will not appear.

MARY ULLATHORNE.

‘Does that letter vex you in any way, dear?’ inquired Mrs. Brooke, when she saw that her husband had suddenly become rather silent.

‘Yes—no. It would have vexed me terribly if we had not had this talk together. I defy anything to vex me now.’

## CHAPTER XLI.

Thus do all traitors ;  
If their purgation did consist in words,  
They are as innocent as grace itself :  
Let it suffice thee that I trust thee not.

*As You Like It.*

How was the so-called Lady Brooke to be treated? This was the question which the Brookes of Harley Street lost no time in putting to themselves after the real Lady Brooke's death and the disclosures which had preceded it. Dr. Brooke had a burning desire to introduce her to the notice of the nearest policeman ; but being reminded that that was incompatible with letting her go her way in peace, he declared that he would never see or speak to her again. But, after all, his part was an easy one to play, for she had no wish whatever to see him or to speak to him, and never did either when it was possible to avoid it. Mrs. Brooke



felt an equal repugnance to her ; and as for Olive she loathed the very thought of her. At the same time, all three considered themselves bound to let her depart quietly—that is, without any open scandal.

Two days after Olive's flight from Welbeck Street Lady Brooke called in Harley Street, and was told that the whole family was out. This she did not believe, and was furious at being denied admittance. On this particular day she had not meant to stay long with Olive ; she had others to see as well as her undutiful stepdaughter, and more crops of dragons' teeth to sow than one. Being turned away from Dr. Brooke's door, she stopped a cab and began her rounds by paying a visit to Mrs. Ullathorne.

‘ Mary,’ said she, ‘ you have been kinder to me than any of Chesterfield's sisters—I shall always be grateful to you. I wish you would come out to India. The climate would suit you admirably, if you only stayed six months or so.’

Mrs. Ullathorne shook her head. ‘ I don't expect to be long here. I have much to do

and to think of—my house must be set in order.’

‘Oh, I am so sorry if anything is wrong,’ cried Lady Brooke, who was not conversant with phraseology of this kind. ‘It is Olive’s fault if there is ; she said she would look after everything.’

Mrs. Ullathorne growled, but did not condescend to explain. Lady Brooke continued : ‘Mary, what do you think of Selina encouraging Olive to set me at defiance?’

‘She is a novel-writing nuisance!’

‘She does not seem to care for the feelings of any of her relations. Have you seen her last novel? They say it is rather better than usual.’

‘Bah! I know the sort of thing it will be. In one of Dr. Johnson’s reviews he says of some book or other, “A man might write reams of such stuff, if he would only abandon his mind to it,” and he would have said the same of Selina’s rubbish.’

‘Then you have not read it?’ persisted Lady Brooke, who found it harder than she expected to stir up Mrs. Ullathorne to the desired point of interest.

‘I—oh dear, no ; I certainly have not read it,’ replied that lady gruffly. She was one of those persons who think that they settle the claims of any book by saying, ‘I have not read it.’ ‘In fact, I read no novels. I leave that to poor empty-headed Sister Lettice—she is never without a novel in her hands. But why do you go on asking me if I have read it? Is there anything in it I ought to see? Has she been putting us all in it?’

‘They say so. I have not read it myself, but I have it here and soon shall,’ said Lady Brooke, tapping the first volume of ‘Cross-and-Fifty,’ of which she had devoured every word. ‘I expect to find a portrait of myself in it when I do.’

‘It’s of no consequence what she does ; she is welcome to put me into every book she writes, if she chooses. I am sure I shall never trouble myself to read any of them.’

‘Oh, she wouldn’t put you in—she wouldn’t take such a liberty.’

‘I feel quite indifferent,’ replied Mrs. Ullathorne, whose curiosity was now piqued to the uttermost. ‘People must describe somebody.

I dare say my character will do as well for her as another.'

Lady Brooke chatted a while longer and then left, but she purposely forgot to take with her the first volume of 'Cross-and-Fifty,' and she had not been gone five minutes before Mrs. Ullathorne discovered it and began to read it with all the spectacle-power at her command. Lady Brooke then went to Mrs. Raymond's. 'I have come to have a little talk with you, Esther,' said she. 'Olive has left my lodgings and gone to Harley Street. I don't know why. Don't you think that Richard and Selina are behaving very ill.'

'They are odd people,' replied Mrs. Raymond, shrugging her shoulders.

'I must see Olive before I leave England—about the Filoselle business, you know; but if they won't let me do so, will you undertake to talk to her about it? The woman has been asking rather disagreeable questions—she is not so civil as she ought to be.'

'She is a fool! She must have heard about Mr. Ardrossan.'

'Yes, of course; but she is very pertinacious.'

Someone has told her that Olive is going back to India with me ; so I suppose she thought it was off.'

'If it were not for the Ardrossan affair, Olive could not do better than go there—she would be snapped up directly.'

'She would not go there. She hates me ; and then Chesterfield is so strange about her. He sits and thinks of that dreadful divorce business until he is quite low-spirited. That's why I have given myself so much trouble about Olive—I can't bear to see him look so dismal. He would be happier if she were married. She is a sullen, disagreeable girl—at least, she is so now. I should have thought she might have been very happy with me. I could have gone on with her, I am sure, if she would have allowed me. I could live with anyone who was at all nice to me.'

This was perfectly true. Lady Brooke could have spent years in Olive's company untroubled by any thought of the injury which she had done her. Lady Brooke never suffered from remorse—had no compunctious visitings of any kind, unless, as was rarely the case, she saw

that she had missed some good which had once been within her grasp.

‘Is Olive sullen? Well, I’ll talk to her.’

‘Do. Make her understand her position thoroughly. It really is necessary.’

‘Indeed it is,’ said Mrs. Raymond gravely. ‘It would not do to have it known and talked about.’

Lady Brooke waited until the last day of her stay in England before she again tried to see Olive. When she arrived in Harley Street, Mrs. Brooke, who had been on guard for days to keep her away from Olive, had just gone out on business. Dr. Brooke too was out. John had been told not to allow Lady Brooke to enter the house, but Lady Brooke would take no denial.

‘Miss Brooke is in her own room lying down, you say, and can see no one! She can’t object to see her own mother. If anything is said about your letting me go upstairs to her, I’ll take all the blame on myself. I must see her.’ I am surprised that anyone should think of trying to prevent me!’ And without listening to another word, and nimble as a girl of

seventeen, she ran upstairs and made her way into Olive's room.

Olive was not lying down or ill, but sitting by the window, trying to copy the colour of Willie's sycamore-buds. They were in a Salvati glass before her, and both her work itself and the thoughts to which it gave rise were very pleasant to her.

'Olive,' said Lady Brooke, as she burst thus suddenly in on her, 'I have come to see you, because to-morrow I leave England.'

Olive rose and grasped the edge of the table to support herself. Then she stood looking at her stepmother with as much calmness as she could muster, but with an expression of intense dismay and dislike.

'Olive,' said Lady Brooke gently, 'you seem to have some very strong feeling against me. I have none against you. I do not like to go to another quarter of the world with the impression that something is amiss between us. I know girls often dislike their stepmothers, but still I have not been such an unkind one to you that you need wish not to see me before I go. Now, have I?'

Olive was silent ; she was struggling with emotions of the most painful kind, which, in obedience to her mother's wish, she was desirous to conceal.

‘ You left my lodgings suddenly more than a week ago—you have twice left my house in the same way without telling me—once you say it was to avoid seeing a gentleman. You can't plead that excuse this time, for you went away with one. It was very odd of you to do that ; but be odd if you like—only don't be so remarkably unfriendly. Why have you shut yourself up here and done your best not to see me ? ’

‘ I—I thought it was better not——’ Olive began.

‘ Why better not ? I have given up the idea of gaining your affection, but I have done nothing to make it impossible for you to stay under the same roof with me for the two or three days which had to pass before I left. Think how strange it must seem to everyone ! Olive, your father's wife has at any rate a right to be treated with the appearance of respect.’

‘ Don't speak of this to me,’ cried Olive,



putting the greatest constraint on herself ‘Do not make me say——’

‘But I want you to say all that you have to say—I want to know how I am to answer your father when he asks for an explanation of your treatment of me.’

‘Tell him what you like—only leave me alone.’

‘Leave you alone! You talk in a way which I don’t understand.’

‘Leave me,’ said Olive faintly; ‘leave me, I beg of you—I must not try to make you understand.’

On this Lady Brooke’s pale face flushed rose-red, and she exclaimed, ‘Do you order me to leave the room, Olive?’ Then she changed her manner and said, almost tearfully, ‘I give you my solemn word of honour that I have tried to be a good mother to you.’

The words which she heard, the restraint which she was compelled to put on herself, the terrible excitement of the scene, were almost more than Olive could endure; she sank into her chair and hid her face in her hands. She was almost beside herself with pain. Lady

Brooke's eyes were fixed on her ; she saw how she was suffering, and said kindly, ' Dear child, I have only come to say good-bye—I am going back to your father. What am I to say to him? '

' What you think right,' replied Olive very bitterly.

' That's not what I meant. Of course I will try to say what is right,' said Lady Brooke simply, as if she were quite too good and high-minded to do otherwise. ' I mean to make light of the little differences which have arisen between us. Indeed, I daresay before I reach India I shall have forgotten them ; but that's not what I wanted to say—I meant that I should like to be able to tell him that you were about to make a happy marriage.'

Olive looked up with flashing eyes, and the expression of her face was so proudly indignant that Lady Brooke cried, ' You surely don't object to my taking an interest in you? '

' I do. I will not have it ! Leave me and my future, and all that concerns me, entirely alone ! '

' Olive, you ought to be ashamed of your-

self! You know that I came back to England entirely on your account. I did not want you to feel yourself an outcast.'

'I do not know it or believe it. I did not feel an outcast before you came. Besides, in my family, the outcasts have been the noblest people.'

'Taunts, sneers, endless reproaches—that's what I have from you, Olive. Well, I will go away, knowing that I have done my very best to be a good mother to you.'

'“Mother”! Don't use the word! No one can be so good to a child as her own mother—you should have left me mine!'

'I should have left you yours! I had nothing to do with your losing her. Olive, at last you drive me to speak openly—it will save pain in the end. You are making yourself miserable by believing that letter which Hannah Deanham wrote to you. I know you are. She wrote to you, and she wrote to me too. She is a person who will tell lies on any side, if she is but well paid.'

'I paid her nothing,' said Olive very bitterly.

‘I dare say not ; you perhaps had not the opportunity of seeing her, but you believe the low gossip she put in her letter. You are influenced against me by a servant—and yet you know what she hinted at is untrue. The law proved it to be so. Your poor mother—I do not wish to pain you by speaking ill of her—was very giddy and unprincipled.’

Olive was goaded to the last pitch of endurance. For a moment she looked almost piteously in Lady Brooke’s face. The words ‘Leave me, I entreat you, or you will drive me to say what I ought not,’ were on her lips ; but Lady Brooke’s face was hard as iron, and she added, ‘Her conduct nearly killed your father.’

Olive sprang to her feet, opened a drawer in a cabinet, took out a small packet, and cried, ‘Don’t repeat that lie again ! You have said it very often to me. Whatever was done to hurt my father was done by you—you have neither heart nor conscience. This parcel is yours—take it and go, and never come near me again !’ And as Olive spoke she pushed towards Lady Brooke a small packet—not for worlds would she have encountered the risk of

touching her hand by giving it otherwise. Outside the parcel was written, 'Part of fifty pounds of Lady Brooke's money left by Hannah Deanham for the use of her sister Mary, now residing at 33 Mulberry Street, Bethnal Green, which Mary Gardiner desires to return, now that she knows that it was earned by a crime.'

Olive had not intended to give this to Lady Brooke herself—she had meant to send it to her; hence this long explanation outside. Lady Brooke started when she read it, and turned very pale. Then she looked almost piteously at Olive and said, 'You have seen Mary Gardiner? She is in England!'

'I have seen her, and heard her story, and have in my possession proof that it is true.'

'It is not true, and no such proof can exist. Hannah Deanham's word is as much to be relied on as her sister's.'

'I have four letters of Hannah Deanham's, in each of which she owns that she committed perjury by your instigation.'

'Tell me what you intend to do?' said Lady Brooke, after a dismayed pause. Her voice faltered—she seemed to acknowledge

that her future was in Olive's power. Olive shook her head—words failed her.

‘Olive,’ pleaded Lady Brooke, ‘your father and I have lived very happily together for nearly twenty years. It seems a terrible thing to ruin the rest of his life—he is an old man now.’

‘Do not talk to me of your happiness,’ cried Olive wildly. ‘How dare you? If you have lived happily with him you must be a wretch to be able to do it. Did you never think of the wife whom he loved so much before you married him, and of the state to which you had brought her?’

‘Of course I did. But most of her unhappiness was caused by her brother; you must know that. She never even pretended to love her husband.’

‘She tried to love him; she would have loved him in the end. She faithfully did her duty to him. She obeyed him when he told her to forbid Mr. Lilburn to come to the house; and if she did not love him quite as much as she ought to have done, she must have loved her child. You were her greatest friend, and

you robbed her of her husband and home and child. You took from her her good name, and left her nothing—not even her reason! For twenty years she lived, sometimes quite mad with misery, always half beside herself. I have been told that her one cry, day and night, used to be, “Let me have my child back.”’

‘You can see her now,’ pleaded Lady Brooke; ‘she has got you back now.’

‘She is dead!’

‘Dead!’ echoed Lady Brooke.

‘Yes, dead; she died a few hours after she saw me. She had lived in poverty and disgrace—not allowed to see her own child. She knew that if ever I heard her name at all, it would be as that of a woman too wicked to be loved.’

‘If she is dead,’ cried Lady Brooke eagerly—‘I did not know it, of course, or I would not have spoken as I did—but if she is dead, you have no reason to do such a cruel thing as making Mary Gardiner’s story public would be. Why should you disturb our happiness, Olive? No one will be the better for it if you do.’

Olive’s lip curled. There was no making this woman think of anyone but herself. I

don't envy your happiness,' she said most bitterly, 'but I am not going to disturb it. My mother's last words were that she did not wish the truth to be made known. She said that my father had chosen to doubt her when, if he had trusted her, his doing so would have made all the difference, and that it was nothing to her now if he changed his opinion. She did not want him to be miserable, or your children to be branded with disgrace. I shall obey her wishes—you have nothing to fear from me.'

'It was very noble of her, and very sensible too. Olive, one thing I must beg of you.'

'Ask nothing of me—say no more; go back to my father and be happy if you can. I have told you what my mother said. I have nothing more to say to you. I only wish you would go out of my sight.'

Lady Brooke was thoroughly uncomfortable. The strongest feeling of her nature was a desire to be at ease in mind and body. She earnestly wished that Olive would say just one word or two which would recur to her memory when she recalled this scene, and enable her to feel that, terrible as the interview had been, it



had on the whole ended better than could have been expected. She did not wish to remember that she had been driven forth with shame and contempt. She looked to see if there was any sign of Olive softening. She could see none. 'I leave England to-morrow. We shall probably never meet again,' said she, thinking that this might lead to the comforting sentence being spoken.

'Meet again!' cried Olive. 'I will never see you again—how dare you speak of such a thing, after what you have done?' And as she spoke her gaze was unflinching.

Lady Brooke could not meet it—she hesitated and almost trembled. How was she to leave the room? 'You have behaved very well——' she began.

'Hush!' cried Olive. 'I will listen to no more, certainly not to thanks. I have obeyed my mother, that is all. Leave me at once, if you please; I can bear no more of this.'

Lady Brooke turned, and, with her head bent down in as much of shame as she was capable of feeling, crept out of the room and left the house.

## CHAPTER XLII.

*Widow.* And now you know my meaning.

*Kath.* A very mean meaning.

*Taming of the Shrew.*

*Ros.* Patience once more, whiles our compact is urged.

*As You Like It.*

MRS. RAYMOND had at least a dozen engagements for a certain April afternoon, and there was not one of them which did not seem to promise a very fair amount of enjoyment; but she left them all unfulfilled, and went to Harley Street to speak to her niece Olive on a matter of importance. ‘I don’t like having to do this,’ thought she. ‘I don’t like it at all, but I have no choice. Olive can’t be such a fool as to want any advice from me about Mr. Ardrossan, but I must keep my promise.’ She asked if Mrs. Brooke was at home. For years, when she had put that question, John had muttered sulkily. ‘She is in the study, ma’am.

She told me to say she was engaged.' To this she had as invariably responded, 'Oh, very well; say I've called.' For Mrs. Raymond, once a great beauty, and still, as she hoped, a very fascinating woman, didn't see why she need show any anxiety to see her inky-fingered and absorbed sister-in-law, unless her sister-in-law had an equal desire to see her.

To-day John looked alert and said, 'Mrs. Brooke is at home; she's in the drawing-room.'

'Alone?'

'Yes, alone, ma'am.'

'Writing?'

'Oh dear, no, ma'am.'

Mrs. Raymond could not believe her senses. 'Selina,' said she, 'I want to talk to you; but first tell me if you have brought Mary Ullathorne round?'

'No.'

'Have you tried?'

'Yes, Richard went, and said he was very sorry I had made one of my characters seem to be rather like her by seizing on two or three of her little peculiarities——'

'You don't mean that you allowed him to

own that any part of that character was drawn from her?’

‘I could not help doing that—you see, it was.’

‘You should have sworn that you drew it from me. You should have sworn anything, to put her in a good-humour again.’

Mrs. Brooke looked indignant. ‘I am not going to tell untruths for the sake of her money.’

‘I would tell mountains of untruths for it. What would I not say and swear?—I would even maintain that she was sweet-tempered. She will never forgive you.’

‘It is vexing, but it can’t be helped. I am sorry, for Richard’s sake. Esther, what a run that book would have if only we could put a flyleaf into it saying, “This book has cost the author a legacy of 70,000*l*.”! I really do think a generous public would hasten to make good the loss. However, I shall always be grieved to think that I have hurt her feelings.’

‘Never mind her feelings. She has none. I don’t care a pin for that part of the matter. I am thinking of poor Richard—it must be a

fearful disappointment to him. Vincent would have killed me if I had done such a thing. Selina, tell me about Olive and Mr. Ardrossan. She will accept him, I suppose?’

‘Mr. Ardrossan! Is he likely to propose to her?’

Mrs. Raymond stared—this vernal simplicity, this mental opacity, was quite beyond her power of comprehension.

‘He certainly has been a great deal here lately, and we are glad to see him. He comes every other day.’

‘Well, what does that look like?’

‘I have never remarked that he was fond of Olive.’

‘Will she accept him if he offers to her?’ interrupted Mrs. Raymond impatiently.

‘But he is far too old for her—he must be twenty years older than she is.’

‘If he were forty years older, it would still be a splendid match for her! Selina, do show a little more worldly wisdom. I’ll go and speak to Olive. Where is she?’

She went to her niece. She approached the subject daintily and delicately; but as soon

as Olive caught a glimpse of her meaning, she was up in arms in a moment, and cried, 'Aunt Esther, you are as bad as my stepmother! That is just the way in which she used to talk to me as soon as any gentleman had said three or four civil things to me.'

'Quite right too. Only a part of a mother's duty. Olive dear, your stepmother, as you call her, is gone, and nothing I say can make any difference now; but I must say that you treated that poor woman very ill. Let me speak—don't be vexed with me. I am your aunt, and have known you since you were a baby—you really treated her cruelly. Forgive me, but I must for once remind you that the circumstances were peculiar; and if, when she came to England, she had left you to yourself, and not taken you everywhere with her, as she did, no one could have blamed her. She was not bound to feel much interest in you, but she did. She devoted herself to you all the time she was here, and never once left you for any pleasant visit of her own.'

'She was afraid to leave me. She was keeping watch to see that certain persons of

whom she was much afraid did not approach me. She was in constant terror lest they should tell me things which it was important for her to conceal.'

'Oh, nonsense, Olive! your Aunt Selina has infected you with her love of imagining plots for novels.'

'Aunt Esther, this is a painful subject, but my stepmother has gone, and you may as well know the truth about her. It is a secret which I am forbidden to make public. It must not be known beyond our own family. Go to Aunt Selina and ask her to tell you what we know about my stepmother. I would rather you should hear it from her than from me.'

Mrs. Raymond began to be afraid that Olive was mad. More than once lately she had seen signs of great mental excitement in her, and had feared that there was a danger of her being attacked by her mother's terrible malady. She looked anxiously at her now, and crept away to Mrs. Brooke, not really believing that there was anything to hear, but wishful to pacify Olive.

After some time she returned, looking pale

and nervous, and as if she had received a shock she would not readily forget. She stooped and kissed Olive, and said, 'Dear child, your aunts have always loved you; they must now love you more than ever. What I have heard makes me still more anxious to say what I came to say. Don't be vexed with me if I try to gather from you what your intentions are with respect to Mr. Ardrossan. It is so important that you should have a home of your own.'

'Is it not rather indelicate to begin to settle what you will do about a gentleman who has never so much as shown that he has any intention of asking you to marry him?' cried Olive.

'Oh, it is constantly done,' said Mrs. Raymond. 'You must have an idea what you will do.'

'He is very kind to me, but he does not care for me in the way you seem to think.'

'I know better. Olive, he is a charming man—so handsome, so intellectual, so distinguished-looking!'

'Yes,' said Olive warmly; 'he really is.'

'Oh, I see it is all right. I was sure you



could not be blind to his attractions. I need say no more.'

'I am not blind to his attractions. I like him immensely, and it would be very ungrateful if I didn't; but I must tell you that, supposing such a very unlikely thing happened as that he should propose to me, I should not accept him.'

'But that's absurd—so absurd that I can't believe it. Have you any reason for refusing him?'

'No very special reason,' replied Olive, looking rather confused.

'Then I may as well tell you that there is a very special reason why you ought to accept him—why you must accept him, indeed. If you refuse him, a very terrible thing will happen—there will be a fearful scandal.'

Olive looked, as she felt, intensely curious, but waited for her aunt to continue; and Mrs. Raymond slowly and painfully revealed to her that when Lady Brooke came to England she had felt her resources entirely inadequate to clothing a beautiful girl like herself for fashionable society, where endless changes of costume

and the most lavish expenditure are required, and she had adopted a plan not by any means unheard of in the set to which she belonged. She had taken her to Madame Filoselle—a lady who, as it was well known—though such things are not spoken of—was in the habit of taking six young ladies under her protection, as it were, and clothing them entirely, from their first entrance into society until their marriage. This she always did with the utmost liberality and secresy, but, of course, under certain conditions. The first was that the young lady herself was so beautiful and attractive in every way that it was absolutely certain that she would be sought in marriage by men of rank and wealth, if only she was enabled by Madame Filoselle's assistance to appear to advantage in the society which they frequented. Then, too, she was to make this good marriage within a reasonable time. Thirdly, Madame Filoselle's bill—which would naturally be much larger because of her having to wait for the money, and because the transaction involved some risk—was to be paid by the bride soon after she had secured her rich husband; after which,

common gratitude would demand that she should continue to order all her dresses from the arbiter of her fate—Madame Filoselle. Mrs. Raymond told this to Olive in her own words and with many assurances that it was a common enough arrangement. People did not talk of such things, of course, but everyone of a certain class knew quite well that they were done. Olive heard her in silence and the deepest shame. Her head sank lower and lower, her hands were clasped in helpless dismay ; she felt as if she could not find words to speak. Her aunt was pleased to see that she recognised the gravity of the situation ; she was certain that she would make no difficulty now. Mr. Ardrossan was the rock of safety to which she would fly and cling—what else could she do ?

‘So that’s the long and short of my story,’ said Mrs. Raymond. ‘Don’t let it vex you. One is apt to be startled at a thing of this kind on first hearing of it, but it seemed the kindest and best arrangement we could make to secure your happiness, and it’s continually done. There are always six girls in society who are dressed this way. Women like Madame Filo-

selle have it in their power to do an immensity of good. Many a pretty, nice girl, who has a good home and husband of the right sort, would be in a very different plight if she had not had the good fortune to please Madame Filoselle when taken to her. You are astonished, I see,' added Mrs. Raymond, who was a little uneasy at Olive's strange looks and silence. 'Of course you must be. But you must own that Madame Filoselle has kept her part of the bargain most handsomely. She grudges nothing when once she takes a fancy and sees that her efforts will be rewarded with success. She took to you amazingly. She is beginning to be rather impatient, though. You see, most of her young ladies get something settled during their first season. She is beginning to fidget a little, but I am sure she will go on being nice for some time to come—quite long enough for you to do all you want.'

All the blood in Olive's body seemed to rush to her face as she said, 'So help me God, I will never wear one thing that has come from her house again!'

'You dislike the idea of the arrangement

so much?' said Mrs. Raymond, without the most remote conception of how Olive loathed the ignominy to which she had so unconsciously been pledged. 'I can readily imagine your doing so. We won't speak of it again—only it is right you should know of it—you would be acting in the dark if you didn't. But don't worry yourself, dear; it will be all right. You will marry Mr. Ardrossan—he is a charming man, and, what is better still, he is as rich as a Jew. She won't expect to be paid the whole sum you owe her at once—you can give it to her little by little, as you have it.'

'How horrible! How shameful! Do you mean that I am to steal it when I can do so unobserved?' asked Olive bitterly. 'Aunt, we may as well understand each other. If I loved Mr. Ardrossan so much that I knew refusing him actually meant dying, I would still refuse him. After what you have told me, nothing should ever induce me to accept him. You and my stepmother made this bargain. I know what kind of a woman she is, but I did think that *you* would be worlds above having anything to do with such degradation as this!'

‘Olive, say what you like—it is natural—you are taken by surprise. I won’t be offended with you. I must put the matter plainly before you. You will be obliged to marry Mr. Ardrossan, or someone else who is rich enough to pay for all the things you have had. They must be paid for—that woman won’t go without her money.’

‘I would die rather than do such an infamous thing.’

‘Nonsense, dear! Just look what much worse things than this are done every day by people, and good people too, for the sake of securing things they want. It’s absurd to think so seriously of it. Depend upon it, Mr. Ardrossan will be only too glad to pay your bill, and do anything else for you; and if you have scruples of conscience, you can make less money do—for some time afterwards—until you have made up the sum you cost him, you know, dear. It’s nothing, Olive, I assure you; I could tell you of friends of your own who are doing the very same thing, and whose feelings are quite as sensitive as yours can possibly be.’

‘I have nothing to do with their feelings,’

cried Olive indignantly. ‘They ought to be ashamed of themselves if they know what they are doing! Perhaps they have been betrayed into it, as I have been. Poor things! I pity them when they are forced to reveal to their husbands that they were dressed out to catch the eye of rich men, and have only married them for their money.’

‘“Only married them for their money”! That is such nonsense, Olive—such romantic nonsense! In novels, of course, you read of vulgar, uneducated, ugly, rich men, as opposed to bewitchingly handsome and virtuous low-born geniuses of poor men; but, so far as my experience goes, men of the upper classes possess every attraction a poor and virtuous genius can do, *plus* the comfort of having money enough to make life easy and delightful to the women who are lucky enough to be fancied by them. Have you, for instance, ever seen any poor man, or even any rich one, who, you could honestly say, was more attractive than Mr. Ardrossan?’

Olive blushed deeply and said, ‘I think I have.’

‘Rich or poor?’

‘Poor, at least what you would call poor.’

‘And does he admire you? I mean, is he likely to ask you to marry him?’

‘Oh, I don’t know—he might.’

‘Well, it would have been very silly to accept this poor gentleman at any time, but now it is quite out of the question. This Filoselle business makes it impossible for you to marry a poor man.’

‘On the contrary, it makes it impossible for me to marry a rich one!’ cried Olive with great determination. ‘I would rather die than do that, now that I know what a shameful confession I should have to make to him.’

‘Oh, nonsense! the thing is done, and can’t be undone. You may as well make the confession to a rich man who loves you, and who can pay your bill without more effort than signing a cheque implies. Your poor man would have to be told all the same, and could do nothing but look dismal; and there’s no great help in that. Besides, the talk would be dreadful—newspapers catch at good gossip like this so eagerly—it would be placarded in every paper in London.’



Olive looked shocked but immovable. 'I shall pack up all the things I ever had from Madame Filoselle,' cried she, 'and return them to her. You can tell her that she need never expect me to marry a rich man to pay her, for I never shall.'

'You must be mad, Olive!'

'I don't care if I am. I had rather be mad than bad, and I should have been a wretch if I had made this agreement with Madame Filoselle.'

'Don't waste time in talk of that kind. Don't you see that the woman must be paid? I don't know what you have had during the twelve months that she has dressed you, but I am sure her bill must be nearly a thousand pounds—your court-dress cost 70*l*. You say you will return the things. That would only enrage her; it wouldn't save a penny. They were supplied to you and worn by you, and she will make you pay for them, whether you return them or not.'

'I will not have them here to remind me of anything so disgraceful.'

'You are not very polite, my dear. I told

you the idea was partly mine. I am not usually supposed to lend my countenance to disgraceful things.' And as she spoke, Mrs. Raymond looked at Olive for some admission that the sanction which she had given to the arrangement was a guarantee of its rightfulness; but more than one of her aunt's bits of doubtful morality was rankling in Olive's mind, and she could give no such assurance. Mrs. Raymond began to see that matters were desperate, and to make moving appeals. They too were useless. Then she said, 'If knowing this prevents your marrying Mr. Ardrossan, I shall never forgive myself.'

'It won't. If ever I refuse him, my refusal won't be caused by what you have said.'

'Would you really have refused him if I had not told you this?'

'I should.'

'You don't like him?'

'I like him immensely.'

'Then, why do such a foolish thing?'

'I need not give a reason for that,' said Olive.

‘You like someone else better?’

Olive was silent, but silence amounted to a confession.

‘Your poor man couldn’t pay Madame Filoselle!’ cried Mrs. Raymond in dismay.

‘Of course not; why should he?’

‘Then, what are you going to do about her?’

‘Nothing at all; I made no bargain with her, and decline to be bound by one made by other people. I thought my stepmother had money from my father to pay for everything of that kind. She always led me to think so. I have fifty pounds of my own that Aunt Selina put in the bank for me when I was a child; I will give you that to take to Madame Filoselle. Papa can pay the rest if he likes, but I never can; and if she makes a fuss or a scandal, I shall tell the truth. Don’t look so distressed, Aunt Esther.’

‘What a disgrace!’ gasped Mrs. Raymond; ‘what a fearful disgrace!’

‘A little disgrace is better than a big one. It would be much worse if I did as you wish,’ cried Olive warmly.

‘You are mad ; you are hopelessly wrong-headed ! I must get your other relations to speak to you.’ But on second thoughts Mrs. Raymond found that this would only add to her distress, for, unhappy lady ! to whom was she to turn ? There was not one of Olive’s relations who would take a sensible view of the subject. Selina would be worse than Olive ; Dr. Brooke would be a thousand times worse than Selina. He would be perfectly frantic at the very idea of such a degrading transaction. Mrs. Ullathorne would be more indignant than either, for such doings belonged to a world which was quite beyond her ken. Besides, she was in the vein for taking offence with her relatives and cutting them out of her will. She most certainly must not be told—any sacrifice was better than that. ‘Olive, promise me not to speak of this to anyone just yet. I will go to Madame Filoselle’s and see if I can get her to be reasonable. I must see if your uncle Vincent can afford to pay her. I know he has no spare money at present—he very seldom has ; but to avert disgrace, perhaps——’ And the poor lady sighed. Then she added pit-

ously, 'Perhaps, after all, you may marry Mr. Ardrossan?'

'Never!' cried Olive; 'I would not do such a thing for the world.'

In the deepest distress and agitation Mrs. Raymond took her departure. She was forced to go and say a word or two to Mrs. Brooke before she left the house.

Mrs. Brooke was reading—she had not had leisure for such an enjoyment for years. She looked up and said rather ruefully, 'After nearly two hours of solid talk you must have persuaded poor Olive into any marriage you wish;' but Mrs. Raymond's looks showed no sense of success; all she said was, 'Olive is very vexing; she says she likes Mr. Ardrossan immensely, but will refuse him if he offers. I am terribly disappointed.' Mrs. Brooke looked quite composed. Her theory was, that if a girl wanted to marry a man, she did marry him; and if she didn't want to marry him there was no more to be said.

Seeing she was slow to express sympathy, Mrs. Raymond cried indignantly, 'Selina, you

are as bad as she is; you surely understand what a splendid match it would be?'

'Not unless she wishes it.'

'She ought to wish it. She is a stupid goose! This will be the second good marriage she has missed. She will get a crooked stick at last, and I for one shall be very glad. She deserves to do so.'

'Oh, no,' said Mrs. Brooke, who was certain that Olive's views on marriage were much more likely to be such as she herself could sympathise with than those of her worldly-minded sister-in-law. 'Oh, no, when Olive marries she will choose well. Mr. Ardrossan is far too old.'

'Then she ought to have taken Sir John Ellerton—he was young enough.'

'He was too stupid; he had nothing in him.'

'Then she ought to take Mr. Ardrossan; he is clever enough.'

'Wait till the right man comes.'

'There is a right man, only he is a wrong one. There is someone whom she fancies. I have made her own it. Do you know who he can be?'

‘I haven’t the least idea ; not the least idea.’

‘Nor have I,’ said Mrs. Raymond. ‘He must be some very insignificant, stupid sort of person, or some of us would have noticed him talking to her. I am quite out of patience with Olive—I never saw such a stupidly self-willed girl.’

‘I have great faith in Olive,’ said Mrs. Brooke calmly. ‘Sir John Ellerton, with his youth, and good looks, and health, and wealth, was the golden casket which seemed the most attractive of all to the common eye ; Mr. Ardrossan, pale, refined, and learned, but already falling into the rank of veterans, is the silver casket ; but somewhere or other lurks the humbler-looking but infinitely more precious leaden casket, to which Olive only possesses the true key. She will choose for herself—she knows whom she can love and reverence, and she won’t give her love lightly. I don’t mind her being difficult to please, or taking a poor man when she might have a rich one ; I shall be quite content with the leaden casket, if it holds what is best for her.’

Mrs. Raymond made a gesture of extreme

impatience. ‘You are a novelist,’ she said, ‘and you think that quoting a poet or bringing in a fanciful allusion settles a difficult question. Gold and silver and leaden caskets have nothing to do with what we are talking about. We can’t have Olive marrying a man who is not able to keep her!’



## CHAPTER XLIII.

‘Das Muss ist hart.’—*Iphigenia*.

MR. ARDROSSAN had reached the mature age of forty-five, and had never until now been seriously in love. His life had been one of activity in many directions. His father was a merchant, who had rather surprised the world by the enormous fortune which he left behind him—a fortune built up as silently and imperceptibly as a coral reef, by sheer strength of organising power, constantly exercised, and self-multiplied through agencies scattered all over the world. Large as the fortune was (and Lancashire, it is well known, is not readily surprised in matters of that kind nowadays), it was allowed on all sides that it must have been well and honestly made. Robert Ardrossan’s name was a synonym for unblemished uprightness on any Exchange where it was mentioned. It was rumoured

that the rule of *caveat emptor* was not in his office held as one to be rigidly observed against a fellow-trader ; in fact, that he preferred the golden rule, and did his best to carry it out in all his dealings. Of his three sons he had settled that the eldest should succeed to his own place in the business, and perhaps in due time to the seat in Parliament which he himself had gained too late in life to admit of his making any figure there ; his second should be what he wished to be—a soldier ; and the third should also follow the bent of his wishes, which pointed to a life of scholarly calm and philanthropic effort. Almost from the first, however, it was evident that this third son had inherited the largest share of his father's ability. He was the most quiet and assiduous of students ; well liked at school and college, but with a strong turn for visiting the poor, and with slightly quixotic views about the duties attached to wealth. Later on he might possibly have buried himself in a Scotch manse with the little world of a few Highland glens for his benevolent activity to work upon, and the endless world of philosophical inquiry tempting him to

ever active intellectual exercise, had not the duties connected with the great town which was the centre of his father's business, and the terrible needs which he saw there, absorbed his whole energy. Then came a great change. His eldest brother was lost by a slip on an Alpine glacier ; his soldier brother was carried off by a fever in India ; and his father died within a year of these misfortunes. John Ardrossan was called to rule in his stead. He did his new work well, but he never gave up that which was dear to him before wealth and position were thrust on him. As soon as he could, he resigned his place in the firm in favour of a cousin on the mother's side, and then toiled at his various social reforms with the enthusiasm of a Romney Leigh, but with the keen shrewdness of a thorough man of the world. Year after year he spent with heart and brain absorbed in these things to the exclusion of all else, and so it might have continued to the end if he had not met Olive Brooke. He admired her as he had never admired any woman before. She was beautiful with the beauty he most valued, intelligent,

docile, and in every way charming to him, and he felt that if he could prevail on her to be his wife he had nothing left to wish for. He could not well measure her feeling for himself. She was unmistakably fond of him, but he sometimes—nay, often—feared that the affection she gave him was only that of a child for a father. He had, however, watched her narrowly, and had ascertained that there was no one whom she liked better, unless, perhaps, it was Morrison. He was quite aware that Morrison loved her, but believed she had refused him. He had seen nothing of Morrison for some time—principally because he had taken no steps to do so, all his time having been divided between Bethnal Green and Olive. He did not know that Morrison was now engaged to another woman. Olive, too, was ignorant of this, and was likely to remain so until Miss Lettice either returned to London or could screw herself up to the task of writing a letter especially addressed to Olive herself, for no one else was likely to care for such a fragment of information. Since Mrs. Brooke's renunciation of novel-writing, to which she adhered religiously, Mr. Ardrossan

had lost many little opportunities which he had hitherto enjoyed of seeing Olive alone. He had, however, used his time in trying to read her thoughts, and was, on the whole, hopeful. On a fine afternoon at the very end of April he ran briskly up certain stone stairs in Pall Mall, for he expected to see Olive very soon after he had got to the top of them. It was the private view of the Old Water-Colour Society, and he knew that she was to be there. She was standing by one of the screens nearest to the door, and was wholly absorbed in the contemplation of a drawing. Eager buyers brushed past her, knots of connoisseurs pressed close, from whose lips fell trippingly cant phrases of praise or blame ; reviewers, note-book in hand, commented on mysteries of execution. She heard nothing, saw nothing but that bit of cunningly stained paper ; and when he saw her eager interest, Mr. Ardrossan, the envy of half the young men in London, would willingly have resigned all the great possessions which they coveted, to change places with Morrison, whom they would have despised, but who had that subtle something men call genius, who had golden youth

and hope, and, more than all, the power of making Olive's eyes glow thus with admiration.

She had changed her style of dress. Hitherto Mr. Ardrossan had always seen her in the dainty but elaborate confections of Madame Filoselle; but all Madame Filoselle's confections had been sent back to her, and to-day Olive wore a picturesque last-century dress, and he had never seen her look so well. It was part of her wardrobe before Lady Brooke came back from India, and its colour was a strange dull red. Mrs. Brooke said that it was something like strawberries-and-cream—Mrs. Ullathorne, more prosaically, compared it to brick-dust well mixed with lime. We leave the discriminating reader to judge between the two ladies. She wore a soft hat of the same material and a tiny frilled cape, and just as she was leaving the house her Aunt Selina had completed her costume by thrusting a 'posy' of Lent lilies into her hand. Mr. Ardrossan approached her, but still her mind was occupied with the drawing on the screen before her. 'Look at it,' said she; 'it is Mr. Morrison's. Don't you think it wonderfully good?'

‘I think it splendid,’ he answered warmly.

‘Everyone seems to think so. I hear people saying such delightful things about it. What would I not give to paint like that! Mr. Ardrossan, how is it that one man can paint a picture like that, while others do such miserably poor dull things?’

He smiled, for he knew she could answer this question she was putting quite as well as he could; but he said, ‘Besides brushes and colours, and skill to use them, you must have what Morrison has: intense love of the thing he is trying to represent, and the mind of a poet.’

‘And he used to be so unpoetical!—at least, I used to think so—you know, we knew each other when we were both children.’

‘Yes, he has told me so. Have you seen him lately?’

‘Oh, no, I never see him. He never comes to my aunt’s. She invites him, but he always refuses.’

Mr. Ardrossan did not understand these two. If Olive had refused Morrison, as he half-thought she had when last he saw them to-

gether, how could she expect him to come to the house where she was? And what did this regret imply? He ventured on another remark, hoping that she would say something in answer to it which would help him to see his way a little better. 'I met him in Harley Street one Tuesday evening. I am sure you remember his being there, don't you?—you had some talk then.'

'Yes,' replied Olive, blushing slightly. 'We talked of old times, when we knew each other, but I am afraid I was not so nice to him as I should have been if my head had not been so full of other things. It was the time you were helping me to find Mary Gardiner. I could think of no one then but my poor mother.'

'Ah, I know, I see, I understand,' said he, and he feared he did understand. He was silent, and during that silence was nerving himself for the terrible effort which it would cost him to do something which he began to see would have to be done. 'Is Morrison here?' he at length asked.

'Yes, my aunt said she saw him—with Dr. Ullathorne and a young lady, I think she said.'



‘I have such good news for him ! I met one of the Ellesmere Gallery people last night, and made a point of asking about our friend’s pictures. They are splendidly hung and immensely admired. They are both centres in the large room.’

‘You are going to tell him?’ said Olive, looking much delighted.

‘Yes. Would you like to be the bearer of the good news?’

‘Yes—no ; but I should like to see how he looks when you tell him.’

‘No, you shall tell him, and I will be the one to watch his looks,’ said he, and he mentally added, ‘And yours too : after which, I think I shall know my fate.’ He shrank from the pain of hearing her refuse him—he wished to keep her as a friend. He had lived forty-and-five years without her love ; and, if it needs must be, had strength to go on to the end alone. He set his fate on the result of the brief interview which he was now arranging to witness from afar. It must not be supposed that these two had enjoyed an unmolested *tête-à-tête*. They had been interrupted a dozen times, but had

resisted all efforts to drag them away to distant pictures by pointing to the dense crowd and crying for mercy. Mr. Ardrossan looked round for a seat for Olive, and just as he had found one, Morrison, Miss Keithley, and Dr. Ullathorne came towards the screen where they had been standing so long. Rose Keithley was insisting on seeing all Morrison's drawings. Olive did not see who was coming; she had just turned away to sit down, but before she could do so was stopped by Mrs. Brooke. Mrs. Brooke never minded disturbing lovers. What would become of novels and novel-writers if that were not done constantly? 'Oh, here you are, Olive!' cried she. 'I have been having such a pleasant chat with the editor of the "*Quixotic Magazine*"! I would have come to you, though, only I saw you were with Mr. Ardrossan; but I'll stay with you now. Oh, no, by the way, I can't, but I'll come back in a minute. There is a man just coming into the room whom I must speak to—if I don't catch him now, he will be swallowed up in the crowd, and I shall have no chance.' And she hurried away, for she had caught sight of a celebrated critic, who had, in

a review of 'Cross-and-Fifty,' just complained that the character of the cross lady was altogether unnatural.

'It's rather hard,' she said to him, 'that, after losing a legacy of seventy thousand pounds for making that character so very like nature, I should be told by you that it is not like at all!'

'“What so false as truth is”!' cried he gaily. 'Browning tells you that, and this gallery will tell you that a piece of literal transcript is a perfect blot in a work which claims to be imaginative at all.'

But Mrs. Brooke felt she must argue that point, and began to do so.

In the meantime Dr. Ullathorne had espied Mr. Ardrossan, who had seated himself and was keeping a place for Olive; but Olive was waylaid by admiring friends, and Morrison had seen her, and was waiting until she was released by them. Dr. Ullathorne was tired of pictures and of standing in a warm and crowded room. He dropped down into the seat which was being kept for Olive by Mr. Ardrossan's side, and soon afterwards made his unwilling niece

squeeze herself in also, introducing her as a 'born artist' herself.

'I envy you the possession of so delightful a faculty,' said Mr. Ardrossan, looking into her pretty frank face with some admiration.

'Oh, there's Halstead!' cried Dr. Ullathorne. 'I must go and speak to him. I want to hear about a Select Committee he is on. Rose, will you stay here till I come back? Don't let me lose you.'

'I will watch over Miss Keithley's safety,' said Mr. Ardrossan, hoping, however, that she would not prevent his watching something else in which he took far more interest. 'Do you think this a good Exhibition?' he asked.

'Yes, very; but I like seeing the people as well as the pictures,' said she. 'Don't be shocked. The dresses are so odd, and so picturesque! What a pretty girl that is! But what a dress! Still, I cannot help rather liking it.' She was looking at Olive, who, finding herself alone, and very near Morrison, was at first too shy to approach him even with her good news. She returned to his picture, thus showing some ignorance of artistic nature, for

if she wanted him to join her she might have known that one of his own pictures would only help to keep him away.

‘That is Miss Brooke,’ said Mr. Ardrossan. ‘People think her very beautiful!’

‘That Miss Brooke!’ cried Miss Keithley, and for a moment she was too much overcome by the sight to say more. Mr. Ardrossan never even observed her comparative silence; he was looking at Morrison, who was standing close behind Olive, hesitating in what way to present himself. But now a fussy little man, with a note-book in his hand and wild anxiety in his eyes, interposed between Morrison and Olive and the two who were watching them. ‘That’s a belated critic,’ said Mr. Ardrossan, ‘a new hand on a new paper, I should say. Listen to him telling everybody that the day is not all pleasure to him, for he has to write about it. A new hand, evidently.’

Rose Keithley made some answer which was just sufficient to prove that she had heard what he said, but nothing more. He noticed its insufficiency, and was glad she did not want to be talked to. He little knew that she was as

deeply interested in what was now passing before her eyes as he was. Again the crowd parted, and Morrison and Olive stood revealed to the two on the ottoman. Had these two been near enough to hear what was being said, this is what they would have heard: 'Mr. Morrison'—Olive was, of course, the speaker—'is it rude to tell an artist to his face what pleasure his pictures give you? I hope it is not, for I want so to say it to you!'

He coloured with delight, and said, 'They can hardly give you as much pleasure as these words of yours are giving me.'

'Mr. Ardrossan has entrusted a message to me,' she continued with downcast eyes, for she was beginning to think that she had been somewhat over-bold in taking this office on herself.

'Oh, I saw him in the room a quarter of an hour ago. I don't know where he is now. May I hear the message?'

'It is this. He was dining somewhere last night where he saw one of the Ellesmere Gallery authorities—someone who knows all about where the pictures are hung, I mean—and he made him say where yours are placed.

They are hung beautifully ; both of them are “centres,” and they are immensely admired by everyone.’

He was gazing at her with eyes full of loving admiration, and if she had raised hers she must have seen it. Two who were witnessing this scene from afar saw more of it than she did.

Olive never looked up ; she dared not, for she had something else to say. ‘Mr. Ardrossan allowed me to be the one to tell you this, because he knew it would give me pleasure, and it does give me great pleasure.’

He did not speak so quickly as she expected him to do ; he was thinking how strange it was that she should be the one to tell him this, how strange that he could not enjoy his good fortune as he ought. The bitter overcame the sweet.

‘You don’t seem half happy enough about it’ cried she. ‘I am astonished at your taking it so calmly. Two pictures in such splendid places ! Why, it is quite an achievement !’

Scarcely had this last word crossed her lips than she could have bitten her tongue off for using it. A speech of her own long ago flashed

into her mind. She remembered how she had assured him of her constancy, how she had entreated him to put it to the test hereafter, when they were older, when he would find her always ready to remember that she had promised to marry him—only before he claimed her he must have some ‘achievements.’ What malignant demon of mischief had thrust that word on to her lips now? She blushed; she said two or three stammering words; she looked up; she saw that he remembered the word and the occasion on which she had last used it quite as well as she herself did, and that he was struck by the use she had made of it now. Their eyes met, and for one brief moment they seemed to see far down into the depths of each other’s hearts. What Olive saw made her turn crimson. ‘I said that word by mistake,’ cried she in an agony of nervousness, thus unconsciously throwing away all defence. Then she tried to recover herself, and with an affectation of gaiety cried, ‘Now, own that you are pleased. Is it not good news?’

‘Yes, it is good news; but how I wish it had come sooner!’



‘Mr. Morrison,’ cried Mrs. Brooke, who, having done with her critic, had now time to look after Olive, and joined her and Morrison at this trying moment, ‘I congratulate you on your pictures here and elsewhere. Their praises are on every tongue. I congratulate you, too, on something else. I have just seen Dr. Ullathorne, and he has told me that you are engaged to be married. Did you know that Mr. Morrison was going to be married, Olive?’

‘No,’ said Olive, ‘I did not, but I am very pleased to hear of it. I wish you every happiness.’ And she held out her hand to Morrison, whose confusion was so great that he hardly saw it.

‘You will bring Miss Keithley to see me, won’t you?’ continued Mrs. Brooke. ‘I know her relations the Ullathornes, of course, and I shall be delighted to make her acquaintance. Come, Olive; I have not seen any of the drawings at the other end of the room. Don’t let us go home having seen nothing. Good-bye for the present, Mr. Morrison. I dare say we shall come across each other again before the afternoon is over.’

While this scene was taking place between

Olive and Mr. Morrison, Rose Keithley and Mr. Ardrossan were still sitting watching them. But even Mr. Ardrossan, who was so engrossed by what he saw, could not fail to observe that his silent little companion had grown alarmingly pale. 'They ought to open their windows wider at these places,' said he. 'I am sure you are suffering from the heat.'

'Yes, the heat—it is hot,' said she drearily—'very hot.'

Then came the crisis—then looks passed between the two which could only be interpreted in one way. Morrison and Miss Brooke were lovers who somehow had been estranged, but in their hearts were lovers still. Mr. Ardrossan cared to see no more; he pressed his lips together, turned to Miss Keithley, and wished that her uncle would come and look after her and let him get home. But her face was whiter than ever; and just as he was going to offer to take her into the air, Dr. Ullathorne came back, too full of some conversation in which he had just been taking a part which pleased him, to notice mere changes of expression or complexion.

‘Miss Keithley is feeling the heat,’ said Mr. Ardrossan. ‘I think she ought not to stay any longer in this crowded room.’

‘Oh, bless my soul, Rose, what a white face you have! Let us get away at once. I don’t see your friend Morrison. I suppose he will think it very unkind of you to go without him. I’ll look for him, but it is no easy matter to find anyone in a place like this.’

Miss Keithley could have pointed him out quite easily. She did not. She moved a little farther along the seat, so as to lose sight of the two whom she had been watching with such pain. She tried to make her uncle come out of sight also. ‘Sit here with me, dear,’ said she to him. ‘Let us wait a little longer. I have a very particular reason for wishing William not to be disturbed for a while.’

When she said this Mr. Ardrossan could have worshipped her. Dr. Ullathorne’s words had informed him of the engagement, but Miss Keithley’s own words told him far more. She had seen all—knew all—knew that she had only a second place in the heart of the man to whom she had plighted her troth—that, some-

how or other, he had been held apart from Olive Brooke, the woman whom he best loved. She was aware of all this, and yet her instinctive impulse was to sacrifice her own happiness to his.

Mr. Ardrossan saw this, and recognised her as a noble, high-minded woman. He saw that she was made of the fine stuff which can sacrifice itself unhesitatingly to secure the happiness of the beloved object.

‘Ah, you don’t want him disturbed, you mercenary little thing,’ said Dr. Ullathorne benignly. ‘You think he is selling pictures and getting good commissions. Well, you are right—the mill must have grist.’

Rose Keithley heard this, and even smiled a sickly smile. In watching her Mr. Ardrossan forgot his own sorrows, but he wished he could have stopped that speech being made. He did his best to prevent any further aggravation of her sufferings by engaging the worthy divine in conversation. They talked, and Rose Keithley sat patiently waiting for what must come. After some little time Morrison joined them. He looked quietly sad, as if he had

gone through some scene which had tried him terribly, but was firmly resolved to do what he thought right. He smiled gravely when he saw Mr. Ardrossan. ‘Oh, you are here!’ said he. ‘I am so glad. And you have been introduced to Miss Keithley, I see—I had hoped to have the pleasure of introducing you myself.’ Then he turned to her and said, ‘Rose, dear, I am afraid you are very tired. I hope you have not been waiting for me.’

## CHAPTER XLIV.

Good phrases are surely, and ever were, commendable.

*Merry Wives of Windsor.*

MADAME FILOSELLE, ill-content with her interview with Mrs. Raymond, and wishing for a prompt understanding with some member of the Brooke family more easy of access than Sir Chesterfield himself, went without delay to the moneyed one—Mrs. Ullathorne. In the interest of public morality it was well she did so, for never, perhaps, in the whole course of the milliner's devious existence did she hear such an unqualified statement of any other person's opinion of her conduct as she did from Mrs. Ullathorne, who told her she was a scheming swindler, a cunning thief of the very meanest kind, an abominable creature who ought at once to be sent to gaol! She repudiated all obligation on her part to pay the debt—she

emphatically declined to touch pitch in any shape. She said she only hoped Madame Filoselle would bring the matter before the public, as she was now threatening to do, for it would be the best means of drawing attention to such scandals. As to the disgrace to her family which would ensue, she professed not to care a pin for that. Her niece, Miss Brooke—the only one connected with the affair for whom she felt any real regard—had been perfectly innocent of what was being done, and had indignantly returned every fragment of apparel or ornament she had ever had from Madame Filoselle, directly she was informed of it. As for Mrs. Raymond and Lady Brooke, Mrs. Ullathorne knew what she thought about them, and the less said on that subject for the present, the better. Mrs. Ullathorne utterly disregarded all threats, would listen to no arguments; in fact, poured out such a torrent of violent abuse that Madame Filoselle, who when she entered had felt herself strong enough to move mountains, had just energy enough left to creep out of the room and feebly make her way back to her carriage. When once her

story was told she had not even so much as a chance of raising her voice.

‘No wonder that woman is a widow,’ she gasped. ‘No man could hold out for a month who had such a creature as that in the house with him.’

Mrs. Ullathorne did not recover her usual equanimity for hours. She did not much wish to do so. She felt herself called on to act, and to let everyone who had been connected with such a shameful transaction feel distinctly and permanently the worse for it. She took pen and paper, and then sat staring at the white page before her for some time, for no words which she could think of seemed strong enough to convey even a tithe of what she felt. She finally gave up the attempt to find any that would be adequate to her purpose. ‘I will just write quietly,’ said she to herself. ‘I dare say a simple letter will be the best. After all, it is the matter which is important, and not the manner.’

‘Esther Raymond,’ she began, ‘I always thought you a terrible fool, but I did not know you were a knave as well. Your milliner,



whom you employed in that disgraceful manner to dress out Olive to catch a rich husband, has been here at my house, to try to extort money from me. I have told her what I think of her, and that I hope and trust she will make the whole thing public, for it will only hurt those who richly deserve to be hurt. She knows what I think of her, so now let me tell you what I think of you. On second thoughts that would require time, and I don't feel very well, and it is of no use to make myself worse by writing to a person whom I despise as much as I despise you. Keep away from me; I shall never again be able to bring myself to be decently civil to you. Anyone who could be a party to such a bargain as you entered into with that disreputable, swindling milliner is not fit for my society, though you have always affected to look down on my friends. Don't come to see me. Don't expect to be the better for anything that I may happen to have to leave behind me when I die, for I certainly shall never let any of my money go to anyone of your stamp. My mind is fully made up, and I am glad you have furnished me with this

opportunity of knowing your true character while I have time to use my knowledge.'

This done, Mrs. Ullathorne read her letter over—was pleased at the calmness and reticence she had displayed in it—sealed and lost no time in despatching it. Then she lay down on her sofa and made Bessie Cochrane fan her, for she said she had had a very unpleasant interview with a person who had spoken with so much temper that she had quite made her ill.

Early next morning Mrs. Raymond called. She was denied admittance. Immediately afterwards Mrs. Ullathorne ordered out the family coach and went to Harley Street to tell Dr. Brooke what had occurred. 'I have seen Madame Filoselle myself,' said he quietly; 'she came here yesterday. My dear Mary, I don't wonder at your being shocked.'

'“Shocked” does not express it, and never will,' cried Mrs. Ullathorne, making a fan of her handkerchief and fanning herself in uneasy desperation.

'It hardly does,' said Dr. Brooke, who felt the disgrace most keenly. 'I am not surprised at Olive's stepmother—she is capable of any-

thing ; but that Esther should be guilty of such a thing !’

‘And Esther will say that we are only shocked because we are not in society,’ said Mrs. Ullathorne, to whom this assertion of her sister’s had always been a dire insult, though she carefully concealed her feelings.

‘There is one law of right and wrong for every kind of society,’ replied Dr. Brooke. ‘For my part, I should like to put people who do such things in gaol.’

‘I do so wish we could!’ cried Mrs. Ullathorne, grasping in imagination big prison-keys of which she was the keeper.

‘Well, we shall hear no more of Madame Filoselle,’ said Dr. Brooke ; ‘I have arranged to pay her.’

‘You have? How foolish ! how vexing ! She does not deserve to have one penny.’

‘I think it more consistent with the family honour that she should be paid. Olive wore the clothes.’

‘Yes, but you may be quite certain that that creature charged twenty times as much as they were worth.’

‘I said so. She is content to take half, and I have promised her a cheque in a month’s time.’

‘Richard, your means are not so good as mine—let me pay her.’

‘Oh, it’s settled now. Besides, I consider Olive my own child.’

Mrs. Ullathorne was deeply touched by her brother’s sacrifice, and by his care for the family honour. With all her pretended indifference, she disliked the exposure immensely. She was silent for some minutes ; then she said suddenly, ‘Richard, I was vexed with Selina about that novel of hers, but I begin to think that is no reason for punishing you. I shall have to see my lawyer to-morrow about cancelling a very good legacy I had left to those odious Raymonds. I’ll get him to restore that bit about you and your family. I’ll not leave anything to Selina, though ; she deserves to be punished for what she did. Besides, with her talents, she can easily originate enough to keep her.’

‘You will do as you like, Mary,’ said Dr. Brooke, who had no great faith in wills which

were re-made so frequently. ‘It is very kind of you to think of leaving me anything—leaving my family, I mean, for you will outlive me by a great number of years.’

‘Do you really think I shall?’ cried Mrs. Ullathorne, very eagerly; but, with a better and more kindly and truer afterthought, she added, ‘Richard, it would be a very great grief to me to lose you. After all, you and I are the two who are most alike in character. We are Calverleys; we take after my mother; all the rest are more or less Brookes. Don’t be low about your health; it is better, isn’t it?’

‘Oh, yes, much. In fact, my doctor says I am well; but I am not so strong as you.’

‘Oh, yes, you are. I am told that Olive sent back everything she ever had from that woman.’

‘Everything! I don’t know that it was of much use, except to mark her disgust.’

‘Give her this cheque for a hundred pounds—she will want new clothes, poor girl. She is a fine girl, Richard—very like what I used to be. I often look at her and think so. Good morning.’

Richard smiled a little, but he was touched by his sister's rough kindness.

When Mrs. Ullathorne got home she found a note from Mrs. Raymond, and, much as she wished to send it back unopened, could not resist her desire to read it. Mrs. Raymond protested that Lady Brooke was the one who was responsible for the Filoselle contract—it was she who had proposed it, negotiated it, and carried it out. Mrs. Raymond entreated her sister to suspend her judgment until she herself had time to write to Lady Brooke, to make her own that it was so. It would be cruel, she said, not to give her time to be able to prove herself innocent.

Mrs. Ullathorne smiled with joyous bitterness. ‘What a state she is in because she thinks she will lose her legacy! Life is uncertain, especially mine. I’ll make my will to-morrow, as I said I would. I must have Richard’s money made safe. If Esther is telling the truth, I can easily make another will. I don’t believe her. But we shall see.’

Meantime Mrs. Raymond was writing thus to Lady Brooke:—

‘Dear Honora,—There is nothing but trouble here. Madame Filoselle is clamorous for payment. She has been to Mary Ullathorne’s. Sister Mary is furious, especially with poor me. I am made to bear the whole brunt of it. It is very unjust and cruel of her, and she is so angry that she refuses to see or speak to me. Now, I require you at once to write to her and take the whole blame on yourself. I positively insist on your doing this. If you do not the consequences will be serious to me, but they will be much more serious to you, for I will at once write and tell Chesterfield certain facts which are being kept from him by some of your family here. I will tell him all that was made known by Mary Gardiner to Olive and to Dr. Ullathorne, namely, how you persuaded Hannah Deanham to act as she did at the trial, and other matters. You see I know all. I must also say that if you had used the five hundred pounds which Chesterfield gave you for the express purpose of defraying all expenses connected with Olive’s introduction into society in the manner in which he expected you to spend it, and not in bribing Hannah Deanham to quit

the country again, all this vexation might have been spared us. You could then have paid Madame Filoselle's bill yourself, or at any rate a large part of it. You must have known that Olive would never marry sensibly, and yet you used the money thus. I know that you received it, for Chesterfield mentioned that in a letter to Vincent. I insist, therefore, on your taking the entire blame on yourself. It will do you no harm, for I am sorry to say that no member of our family can think worse of you than they do already, and nothing else will restore me to Sister Mary's good opinion. If she remains angry with me my life won't be worth having, for Vincent would never forgive me, and no one can put things right but you. The moment, therefore, that you receive this you must at once sit down and write as I wish, or I will at once write and put Chesterfield in possession of every fact connected with his wife's trial and his marriage with you. I am not making empty threats—I shall most assuredly do as I say.'

Thus wrote Mrs. Raymond, and forthwith despatched her letter ; and if when Lady Brooke



left England she had not, as usual, departed with a lie on her tongue, she would have received it. Everyone had at first expected that she would go to Lausanne and take some of her girls back to India with her. She, however, wanted a good excuse for again leaving her husband, in case his doubts about his treatment of his first wife once more made his companionship oppressive to her. In order, therefore, to account for leaving them at school a little longer, she had pretended to Mrs. Raymond that Chesterfield had written a letter urgently desiring her return without one day's delay. She had set out with apparent haste, but had spent a fortnight in Paris. She had no particular reason for wishing to stay there—she was only taking her journey easily and pleasantly; but the consequence was that Mrs. Raymond's letter reached India before she did, and Sir Chesterfield, seeing that it was from his sister Esther, opened it and read it.

## CHAPTER XLV.

Love seeketh not itself to please,  
Nor for itself hath any care,  
But for another gives its ease.—BLAKE.

MR. ARDROSSAN spent the night after the Private View in a state of considerable restlessness and disappointment. He had not known before how much he loved Olive. He felt, too, that he had become a good deal older all at once, and that a larger piece of his life had slipped away from him than he had been aware of. People grow older gradually, no doubt; but it is strange what distinct breaks occur to some of us, in which a period of life is, as it were, summed up and seen to be the distant thing it really is. Mr. Ardrossan felt this, and fervently wished that someone like Olive had crossed his path many years before. Puritan, philosopher, philanthropist as he was, he had

always been thoroughly popular in society. He had never been tempted to isolate himself for his principles or to regard the gay world from the standpoint of a 'superior person.' His desire to serve Humanity (big-lettered) had been united with a warm-heartedness which made John and James and Mary objects to him of true liking and sympathy, while he was helping them as a matter of duty. But he had not by any means intended to remain a bachelor. Had time really gone so fast? It seemed to him only the other day that he had left Oxford—only the other day that, full of enthusiasm and zeal, he had taken the chair at his first meeting.

Perhaps he would have suffered much more if, along with his own little grief, he had not had Miss Keithley's much larger one to think of. He could not forget her or the look of keen anguish which had come into her eyes as they watched her dearest hope of happiness passing away from her. 'She was wonderfully brave at the time,' thought he; 'but what must she be feeling now? She is a splendid girl—constant and loyal, and thoroughly unselfish.

What a fellow Morrison is, to have two such women in love with him! I can read the future clearly—to-morrow, or perhaps in a week or so, to do it in an unsuspecting, quiet manner—I fancy she is one who likes to do all quietly—she will write to him, or send for him, and will tell him that she finds she has entirely mistaken the nature of her own feelings and cannot honestly let the engagement go on. From what I have seen of her I am sure that she will do this in a perfectly composed and natural way, so as to cause no suspicion in his mind that she has discovered his love for another. She will leave him free to propose to Miss Brooke, and will take care that he can do so with ease of mind and happiness, which he certainly could not if he knew the truth.'

Next day it was just the same—Mr. Ardrossan could not drive the thought of her out of his mind. Three days afterwards he went to Mulberry Street, Bethnal Green. Amongst other people there he saw Mary Gardiner. Olive's poor mother had died when, if she had lived but a few months longer, it would have been such a joy to her child—this woman, whose

life appeared to be of no value to herself or to anyone, was living still, and likely to live for six months. Struggling with this thought, he left her room, and as he emerged from the dark staircase to the light of day outside, he saw Miss Keithley and her aunt Mrs. Ullathorne (of Bethnal Green) coming up the street.

It was no new thing for Mr. Ardrossan to meet Mrs. Ullathorne when going his rounds in his district. She was constantly to be seen in every corner of her husband's parish ; and Mr. Ardrossan would have gone home with a sense of loss and strangeness if he had not somewhere encountered the good lady, with her well-worn black bonnet and gray waterproof, and her umbrella, which she carried for some mysterious reason, in spite of her own assertion that she had 'nothing on that could spoil.' Such as she was, she always looked at home in these sordid smoke-grimed streets ; but pretty Miss Keithley, in her fresh print dress and white straw bonnet trimmed with lace and cowslips, looked like an unexpected flash of light in them. Miss Keithley had a basket of roots in her hands, which she was taking to a bit of

waste ground left by pulling down some shops and warehouses. Mr. Ardrossan had bought this, and, with some expense of ingenuity and labour, had turned it into a playground and garden for the children of the neighbourhood ; and now even poor Rose Keithley was trying to do something to make it prettier for them by planting a few flowers likely to be strong enough to prosper in such an uncongenial atmosphere. He had had no faith in any flower being able to hold up its head here, and had therefore contented himself with giving a large order for hardy ferns and evergreens ; but she, perhaps, felt that even if her flowers did die in a month or two they would die in a good cause, having, at any rate, given some pleasure before their lives came to an end. He was pleased with her gracious thought. He looked earnestly in her face to see if he had been right in his conjecture as to what her conduct would be. Had she broken off her engagement with William Morrison ; and if so, how was she bearing her separation from him ? He was certain that she had done this—he could see proof of it in every line of her face. Her eyes were heavy

with sleeplessness, her cheeks pale and worn, and there was an air of patient suffering about her which was infinitely touching ; but, manifest as these signs of suffering were, there was equal evidence of fortitude and strong resolution. It was very kind and sweet of her to think of brightening the lives of his poor gutter-children, when her own troubles were so absorbing ; but her own life wanted brightening—she ought to have a thorough change of scene, and be taken away from everything which could remind her of her loss. On the spur of the moment he devised a plan which seemed good in his eyes, and with equal promptitude he laid it before her.

‘Miss Keithley, you paint,’ said he. ‘I hope you won’t be offended if I ask you to take a commission from me—I know you paint landscapes. I want you to paint me twelve half-imperial-sized views of foreign towns. I have a very particular use for them for one of my great undertakings, and I especially want them to be done by a lady.’

Miss Keithley looked very much confused and astonished, and stammered that she was

completely unworthy to be entrusted with such a commission—she could not paint half well enough.

‘Oh, yes, you can : you painted that very pretty drawing of St. Hilda’s, in the Ellesmere Gallery. I saw it there yesterday. I liked it so much that I bought it.’

A glow of pleasure overspread Rose Keithley’s wan face. Had life still something to offer her? If she could do work which was worth doing, she could find happiness in that—it might not be the transcendent happiness she had hoped for when she found she was to have him she loved always with her ; but work has its joys, and she knew it.

‘If I thought I could do them well enough,’ said she, ‘there is nothing I should like so much. I have never been abroad, and the very idea of going is delightful. I’d give anything to go—anything. I have wished it for years.’

Mr. Ardrossan was delighted. ‘Then you will let me consider it arranged?’ said he.

‘But I can’t go alone,’ said Miss Keithley. ‘At least, can I?’ she added, for she was hardly in the habit of looking on herself as a young and



good-looking woman, who would excite attention or admiration.

‘No, you must have a companion ; but no doubt you have some friend who will be willing to go. I leave the choice of subjects to you ; but, if I may make a suggestion, I should like the Italian towns.’

Better and better ! The dream of Rosamond Keithley’s youth had been to earn enough money by her painting to enable her some day to travel and see Venice and Verona, and Rome and Naples—cities whose very names seem to make you richer whenever you hear them.

‘I should like you to go as soon as you can—at once, if possible,’ said Mr. Ardrossan, who was sure that the sooner she went the better would be her chance of recovering peace of mind.

‘It is finding the companion which is so difficult,’ said she in a low voice to Mrs. Ullathorne. ‘I might, perhaps, persuade Aunt Amelia to go with me—the complete change would do her good, I am sure.’

‘Aunt Amelia’ was the invalid aunt who had been with Miss Keithley at St. Hilda’s.

Mrs. Ullathorne made a gesture of horror as soon as she heard her name, and cried, ‘Oh, no; that’s quite out of the question. You must not think of it for a moment. Mr. Ardrossan wants you to paint him some pictures, and to have some pleasure while you are doing them. If you took your Aunt Amelia with you, you would have to spend all your time in waiting on her. Rose, I do wish you would sometimes think of what is good for yourself. You have friends who paint: choose one of them.’

‘We need not discuss this now,’ said Rosamond to Mr. Ardrossan. ‘I will do my best to go quickly.’

Mr. Ardrossan had been watching the faces of both ladies while this journey was being discussed, and had seen a look in Mrs. Ullathorne’s which plainly showed that she regarded it as a joy of too ecstatic a nature ever to come within the reach of a poor hard-worked City clergyman’s wife, whose treadmill of duty claimed her for ever. Mr. Ardrossan and Mrs. Ullathorne had worked together in these busy streets for nearly twenty years, and he knew her

to be as good a creature as ever breathed, and one with whom Rosamond could be quite happy.

‘Couldn’t you spare time to go with Miss Keithley?’ said he. ‘You would be doing me a great service if you could; so, if you say yes, you must allow me to be your banker. Don’t say no. I can get a person whom I know to be trustworthy to take charge of such of your work as must be done while you are away, and I will undertake to persuade the dear old Doctor to let you go.’

Mrs. Ullathorne looked bewildered. A pleasure which had always seemed to be unattainable was suddenly placed within her grasp. ‘I should be only too happy; that is, if you think it could possibly be arranged,’ said she, sighing with suppressed delight.

‘And people tell you not to set too high a value on riches!’ thought Mr. Ardrossan. ‘What folly that is! Thank God for the wealth He has given me! and thank Him also for the opportunity of sharing it with others! You can’t set too high a value on riches. If I had been a man of small means, these two poor

women would have missed what they evidently think a great pleasure.'

All this time they were walking together to the playground, and talking as best they could. Sometimes their way led them through wide streets, full of warehouses, where speech was often interrupted by a great sack of flour or barrel of oil coming swinging down from some window far above to the waggon which was to bear it away. The noise of these waggons as they rolled along, full or empty, was deafening—it was almost impossible to hear what was said; and in the back streets and alleys it was equally difficult to keep up a conversation, for there they were obliged to pick their way one by one through groups of women, who seemed to be standing about for no particular reason—bonnetless for the most part, and shrouded in well-worn Paisley shawls which probably covered up innumerable shortcomings in dress. Little children were there too, looking pale and prematurely old. And no wonder, for all that makes life bright and happy was denied them—the streets where they played were dirty thoroughfares, littered with straw and refuse

of every kind, and the air was so full of smoke that it could be tasted. 'Poor things,' said Mr. Ardrossan to himself; 'how little one can do for them! How little, indeed, for anyone!' But even while this thought was passing through his mind, he saw a look in Rosamond Keithley's eyes which showed that he had been able to do something for her. She had evidently begun to think that life had a future; and as for Mrs. Ullathorne, she was positively almost skipping along the pavement.

The playground was occupied by groups of children, swinging and playing in any way they best fancied. 'Some of them must have been swinging all night,' said a bystander of Mrs. Ullathorne's acquaintance. 'They were hard at it when I went to bed; and when I looked out at four this morning, it was just the same.'

Mr. Ardrossan glanced round in some discontent. The work of growth was not going on fast enough for him. He wished his trees to rise up in one night like the beanstalk of happy memory and shut out the smoky houses, so bedizened with flaring advertisements. At present every commodity of commerce was

pressed on the notice of those who enjoyed the garden. Every house which hemmed it in had its blue or red board with gigantic yellow letters. Here, too, you had the head-quarters of the Army of Salvation, with its war-cry well printed and legible; and face to face with it, on the opposite side of the enclosure, a theatre and a gin-palace; the latter painted emerald green and mauve in one part, dark red and yellow ochre in another; and the whole 'pointed' up with crimson and blue.

'Oh, never mind a little bright colour,' exclaimed Mrs. Ullathorne, who saw what was disturbing him. 'The children like it—I like it too; so would you, if you lived here.'

'Should I really?' cried he, with a look of such horror that she could not help laughing heartily.

'The ground is prettily laid out,' said she, gazing with great satisfaction on the hard asphalté paths and great heaps of bricks which were piled up in methodical-looking beds and waiting to be made into ferneries.

'I don't know, I am sure; the shrubs look

well enough ; but I want to see the ferns green and growing,' said he.

Rosamond Keithley shared his desire ; but she was doing something more to the point than that—she had taken a trowel out of her basket and was planting her flowers. Seeing her thus engaged, Mr. Ardrossan said to Mrs. Ullathorne, 'I shall send Miss Keithley a cheque for half the price of these drawings to-night. Will you tell me if you think I shall be right in assuming that they will be the same price as that of the same size in the Ellesmere?'

'Quite right,' cried Mrs. Ullathorne, who knew nothing whatever about it, but was sure that Mr. Ardrossan could never be wrong. 'How kind you are to propose to do that!—You remember everything. Dear Mr. Ardrossan, this is such a lucky thought of yours!—so very lucky, for poor Rose is not at all happy just now. In fact, I can't help thinking she is very miserable. She wouldn't like me to tell you, perhaps—so don't say anything to show that I have done so—but she has broken off her engagement with Mr. Morrison. She says she does not love him enough to marry him ;

but I am sure—I don't know—I saw her crying after she had done it, and I always thought she was very fond of him—as fond as anyone could be.'

Mr. Ardrossan had known instinctively that she would do this, so he could not honestly show any surprise. 'And what did Morrison say when she did it?' he asked.

'Oh, he behaved remarkably well—he did everything he could to persuade her to let the engagement go on. He couldn't have behaved better; but she still said she was firmly resolved to break off with him.'

'Then I suppose that's how it ended—he was obliged to let her do as she wished?'

'Well, of course a man has not much alternative when a girl speaks so very decidedly; but he refuses to take her answer as final. He says he wishes her to think it over for six months, after which time he will come to her; and then, if she still declares that she does not love him enough to marry him, he will accept his dismissal, but not till then.'

'In other words, he won't profit by his release until he is quite certain that she knows



her own mind,' thought Mr. Ardrossan. 'I expected him to behave like a gentleman.'

They now went and watched Rose Keithley planting her roots: evening primroses, wall-flowers, snapdragons, pinks, campanulas, and sweet-williams. There was nothing very rare about the contents of her basket; but still in a month or two the playground would look all the brighter for what she was doing.

'It is nice to see those children have room to stretch their legs,' said Mrs. Ullathorne. 'I don't think rich folks imagine what it must be to have nothing but a narrow street to play in—I think if they did, some of the money which goes by thousands to hospitals to help to cure bad diseases would be given to provide open spaces, by way of doing something to prevent them.'

'Mr. Ardrossan,' said Rose Keithley, who had now planted all her flowers, 'the more I think of your kind scheme, the more delightful it seems to me.'

## CHAPTER XLVI.

*Phædrus.* This is the tree.

*Socrates.* Yes, indeed, and a fair and shady resting-place, full of summer sounds and scents.—PLATO : *Phædrus.*

I lay me on the grass : yet to my will,  
Albeit all is fair, there lacketh something still.

CHATTERTON.

‘AND so we awoke, and we rose in the dark, and got with our bags and our brushes to work,’ said Morrison to himself as, about five months after the date of the last chapter, he thrust his neck into the yoke of a large sketching-bag, caught up a sketching-folio, and prepared to leave a very comfortable hotel in Dieppe, where he had been staying the last six weeks, for his morning’s work. He must have been in tolerable spirits, or this adaptation of Blake’s ‘Chimney-Sweeper’ would not have presented itself so readily to his mind ; but in point of fact he was not getting up in the dark at all. That was a fiction indulged in for poetical pur-

poses. In reality it was just half-past seven, and a beautiful September morning ; and, besides that, he was not going out one bit earlier than a host of other people, especially some young ladies who were at the very same time making their way down to the beach to bathe, with stout towels on their arms, and their sea-side back-hair nicely arranged to float about in the sweet haze of early autumn sunshine. As Morrison was leaving the hotel, two of them had come into the garden which surrounded it, and were standing under the bedroom windows of a certain ‘Janie,’ as he gathered from their discourse, and trying to persuade her to go and bathe with them. ‘Janie’ appeared to hesitate—she was sure it would be cold, she said. Morrison thought she only wanted pressing ; but the two outside were not disposed to take much trouble about her. ‘We can’t wait,’ said one. ‘I do wish you would come ; but if you won’t—you won’t.’ On this, of course, ‘Janie’ shook her head with vigorous decision—persuasion would have softened her. The bathers turned to go. ‘Oh, by-the-by,’ cried one, ‘have you seen the “Times,” Janie?’

‘No. Is there anything nice in it?’

‘Nothing very particular—only I was right about that Mr. Ardrossan—I was sure I was at the time. He has married the girl he was always going about with in Rome. I told you he would. I wish I had had a good big bet on it, though.’

Mr. Ardrossan married! Morrison turned back and ran into the hotel again, to have a look at the ‘Times’ and see the name of the lady; and there he read:—

‘At the British Embassy, Rome, John Ardrossan, Esq., of 83 Grosvenor Place, London, and Glen Duich, Ross-shire, N.B., to Rosamond, only daughter of the late Walter Keithley, of Gower Street, London.’

Then he was free to love Olive! He had been faithful to Rosamond Keithley. He had given her six months in which to make up her mind whether she could be happy with him or no, and until he got her answer he had thought it right to avoid Olive. Now an answer had come which was sufficient. Miss Keithley had said at the time that her decision was final, and had declined this offer of more time for thought;

but as he had made it he considered himself bound, and bound, too, if at the end of the period she should come and say, 'I can never love anyone as I love you.' Now he was free! Now he would go to Olive! For this day, however, he was loyally true to his drawing—it wanted more time, and should have the whole day; but he painted with a happy hope in his mind—there was just a chance that she might listen now.

Two days afterwards Mrs. Brooke was sitting with her two pretty young daughters, when Mr. Morrison was announced. He looked round the room for Olive; but no Olive was there; and when he asked where she was Mrs. Brooke said 'She has been in Cornwall, with us and her Aunt Alice, and now she has gone down to Yorkshire, with her other aunt, Miss Lettice Brooke. Oh, by-the-by, Mr. Morrison, you know Austerfield—that's where she has gone.'

'When did she go?' he asked.

'Only this morning. If you had come yesterday you would have seen her. Now I don't know when you will have a chance of doing that, for she won't be back here for ever so long.'

Morrison smiled. There were other places in the world in which he might see Olive besides Mrs. Brooke's drawing-room. He could not help thinking that, though a novelist and given to making plots herself, his dear friend was not quick at seeing plots which arranged themselves. This thought made him put a question. He had already been surprised to find her sitting reading to her daughters instead of writing as usual; so he asked if she had given up writing.

'Oh, no,' was her reply; 'I have not given it up, I hope—the Doctor will not let me do that—but still I don't see how I am ever to go back to it. I find such dozens of things to do; in fact, I am rapidly becoming so firmly woven into the web of family life that I sometimes think I shall never be able to break loose from it again.'

Morrison stayed some time, and while he was thus talking and thinking of her, Olive was on her way to Austerfield. At last she had got permission to go there. As soon as she found herself in Yorkshire she was full of eager interest, and began to persecute Miss Lettice

with questions ; though all she could draw from her in reference to Austerfield was, ‘ You won’t care for it as you used to do.’

‘ Well, at any rate the Grange is as beautiful as I remember it !’ exclaimed Olive, gazing fondly at the venerable lichened walls, all overgrown with flowering shrubs. ‘ And you have the very same chintz !’ she cried when she went into her bedroom, for there were the parroquets as bright and busy as ever. ‘ It is the same ; and my bed in London has had ever so many sets of new curtains ! And, oh ! how delightful ! the books are still there !’ She looked out of the window—there was the garden brilliant with autumn flowers. She went to the looking-glass, almost expecting to see her own childish face reflected in it ; but when she announced her intention of having a run around the garden she was told that dinner was ready ; and when dinner was over it was dark.

Next day she resolved to make her rounds in the order which she had observed as a child. First came the garden. It was lovely ; and so was the orchard, too, with hoary old fruit-trees

covered with large rosy-cheeked apples; but she could find no dark or dangerous places, nor yet any which seemed as if they could ever have been lawfully regarded as such. She opened the wicket-gate which led from the garden to the churchyard. She went to the old stone coffin in which she and Willie had sat so often; then she walked round and looked at the tombstones. She found those of her grandfather and grandmother, and then that which bore the names of Willie's poor grandmother, his butcher-uncle, and some unknown cousins. Another tombstone, with an enormous lily carved on it, marked the grave of the only person in the village of whom Olive had a disagreeable recollection—a certain ill-tempered farmer, from whose tongue appallingly bad words were never absent. It was odd to put a lily on *his* tomb. Next she visited the village. It was a mere collection of dull cottages. She went to the humble home where Willie's young years had been spent. She had always recalled it as a nice little stone house, standing in its own garden. It was a four-roomed cottage, with a water-butt almost as big as itself stand-



ing by the door ; a sanded doorstep and passage, and a strip of cabbage-garden at the side, with an ill-kept hedge, almost smothered with weeds. ‘It is terribly depressing to see these places,’ thought she. ‘And yet, how angry I was with poor Willie for saying that Austerfield was a commonplace village !’ Then she went to the field where Willie had hidden himself behind the corn-sheaves, and after that she walked to the Ayton Bank Farm. What a long, long walk it had seemed then, and how quickly she got there now ! and besides that, it was as unromantic and unpicturesque a walk as could have been found anywhere. She could have sat down and wept, her disappointment was so bitterly keen.

But she had kept the dearest spot of all till the last. At six o’clock in the evening she had always met Willie at a certain lime-tree in the prettiest field far or near, and there most of their time had been spent. That she knew was beautiful, and could not disappoint her. When the hour came she went. The field was very pretty and irregular, and through the midst of it came the rapid little stream she re-

membered so well. There was a time when not a corner of that field was unconnected with some delight. She walked through it now. She entered the little wood—the wood with dangerous places, and long leaps which might be successful and land you on the opposite bank, or might but deposit you in water too deep for safety, for here the channel of the stream was narrow. There seemed to be no place now where she could not step over with ease. It was pretty, it was nice, but it did not stir her heart, except so far as it was associated with Willie.

She returned to the lime-tree and seated herself on the great bare root on which she and Willie had always sat. She had wished to revisit these places for years, and had hoped to be so happy when she did so, and this joy also had proved a mere mockery, as every other joy to which she had ever looked forward had done. She covered her face with her hands and wept when she thought what an unhappy girl she was. She did not believe that there was another girl in England so unhappy as she. And she was not miserable without a cause. Her

troubles were substantial things—hard to bear at the time, and such as would leave their mark for life. Her early youth had been happy, but she had never been happy since. From the age of ten she had lived stinted of the love which a child has a right to expect, with bricks and pavement as food for her eyes, and dull lessons as food for her mind. Then came that hateful time with her stepmother, during which she had suddenly discovered that she had a mother of her own. How the discovery had delighted her! But she had found her mother only to lose her. Besides this grief, the disgrace which stained her family was intolerable to her—her mother's divorce, which was still held to be a just sentence—the fact that her own father's sister could make such a dishonourable contract as Mrs. Raymond had done—there were so many things to make her hide her head in shame! And Willie! There was another deep disappointment. She had longed for years to be reunited to him; and when she did see him again, how had he treated her? She was not thinking of his behaviour in the train—that she had forgiven long ago—

his heroic conduct afterwards had quite thrown into the shade anything he had done to offend her; nay, more, had won her admiration for life. Besides, her own conscience told her that all he then said was true, and that her mode of life at that time was not such as a man of his stamp would care for. It was afterwards that he had treated her so ill. He had seemed to love her—had asked her to marry him, and then in an incredibly short space of time had engaged himself to another woman! How could he do so? How could any man be so fickle? With feminine perversity, in which she was by no means deficient, she did not take her refusal of him into account at all. ‘He might,’ thought she, ‘have seen that my head was quite full of something else—of something very important, which was making me far too unhappy to be able to think of love or of him—he might have waited till that was over. Besides, if he cared for me at all, how could he change so quickly? I turned to him directly my mind was my own again and I was able to think of him and knew he loved me. I believe I have loved him all my life—not, perhaps, as

an existing person, but as one of whom I dreamed; and when his flowers came I loved him just as much as ever, for I knew he was as nice as he used to be, or he would not have thought of sending them to me. But to go and get engaged so quickly !’

A slight sound startled her. She turned, and Morrison stood behind her. His train had brought him to Austerfield just in time to go to the old trysting-place at the old time. She rose to her feet, but was too much startled to speak. He too was scarcely able to speak, for he had said to himself all the way as he came, ‘If she cares for me at all, I think some feeling will make her, on this first night of being at Austerfield, visit our old place of meeting at the same hour that we used to go.’ He had said this, and she was there; and when he saw her, his face grew radiant with happiness and his eyes bright with hope.

‘How do you do, Mr. Morrison?’ said Olive rather stiffly. ‘I did not expect to see you here.’ She was terribly mortified that he should have found her where she was.

‘No, of course you did not,’ said he; ‘but I had just a very faint hope that I might find you.’

‘There are not many walks in Austerfield,’ said she; ‘one has to go to such as there are.’

‘I wanted,’ he said, ‘to think that you came here, as I myself should always come, for the sake of former times—with some wish to see a place where I had spent so many hours—so many happy hours.’

‘Of course I did,’ replied Olive. ‘I have been to all the places where I used to play when I was a child, so naturally I came to this as well as the others.’

‘I saw Mrs. Brooke yesterday,’ said he; ‘she told me that you had left London for Yorkshire that very day.’

‘You were in London yesterday? Then, did you come here to-day?’ asked Olive, much surprised, and not at all pleased.

‘Yes, I came to-day, because I wanted to see you.’

‘To see me?’ she said coldly; for, under the circumstances, engaged as he was to another woman, she did not approve of his wishing so much to see her.

‘Yes, to see you—the one person whom of all others I shall always most wish to see. Miss

Brooke,' he said hastily, 'sit down again one minute—you were sitting when I came. Sit down and listen to something which I must say to you.'

'Oh, no, it is late. I must go home,' said Olive confusedly. 'What have you to say to me, Mr. Morrison?'

'Much—everything—you must listen.'

'Oh, by-the-by,' said Olive, 'I am quite forgetting to ask how Miss Keithley is—do tell me.'

'Miss Keithley has married Mr. Ardrossan. He has got as noble a woman as ever lived. That's why I am here. I should not have been speaking to you now had it not been for this marriage; but, whether I came or stayed away, I should always have set you far above her and all other women.'

'What! when you were engaged to her?' cried Olive.

'Yes, even when I was engaged to her. Miss Brooke, be generous—I will explain everything to you hereafter—but trust me when I say I have not behaved ill about her. I thought it right to ask her to marry me. If you had not been in the world, I have no doubt I should

have loved her much more than I did. I did feel a very strong affection for her, though it was not real love. It was a mistake to offer to her ; but she was the one to discover that, not I. She said she found she could never be happy with me. I was afraid that she had divined that you were the one whom I always had loved, and always would love ; but it seems I was wrong. However, I refused to let our engagement be broken off until she had waited six months, to see if after all she could not be happy with me. She has married Mr. Ardrosan before the six months have expired. I am free. I seek you again—I shall never love any woman but you. You may think me foolish, or what you will, but I believe I have loved you ever since the day we first met. I only know that ever since that time I have never done anything without some secret reference to you. Every picture has been painted with the thought that your dear eyes might see it ; and every time one was praised, I thought, “She may see that it is well spoken of. She may, perhaps, understand how I am trying my hardest to bring myself one step nearer to her.”



I know I am presumptuous ; I know how much more so I must seem here, where there is everything to remind you what a poor little village boy I was when you first knew me ; but still, if you could but love me, I do not think you are one who would care what my relations were. Olive, do love me—I can't live without you—I have loved you all my life.'

During this long speech Olive had sat quietly, but her heart had been deeply stirred. Now she did not look up, but said very gently, ' Won't you sit down beside me—here, in your old place ? ' And she moved a little farther along the rugged old gnarled root. Morrison's head swam with the joy of a hope to which he dared not allow himself to trust. He sat down by her side. He looked at her. Her head was bent down, her hands were lying on her lap. He said, in a voice full of suppressed emotion, ' When we sat here together before, we always sat hand-in-hand.'

Her head sank lower and lower. She did not seem angry with him, but she did not speak.

' Do speak to me,' cried he. ' Tell me if I

may dare to hope. You do not check me, but you give me no hope.'

She was still silent. She was wondering to herself how it was that now, when she so much wanted to speak to him, she could not force her lips to utter one single sound. She tried repeatedly, but still could not.

'I am distressing you,' said he, 'but I must. I have come all the way from France just to say this to you. It is no new thing on my part to feel thus—I said the same thing to you in the winter; I have wished to say it for years. Nothing but my own consciousness that I had no right to approach you with such a proposal has kept me away from you so long. I am still unworthy to offer myself to you, but I have more hope than I had of making a position for myself of which you won't be ashamed; and if you would but love me, dear Olive, I should work a thousand times better. You don't know how I would work and try to do good things.' Having said this, he looked in her face so earnestly that it seemed as if no feeling of her heart could be hidden from him. 'Make some sign if you wish me to be silent on

this subject for ever,' said he, pitying her ; and then he watched her with a sickening dread lest the sign for which he had asked should be given to him.

She made no sign. She even attempted to raise her shy eyes to his and let him see that there was a gleam of love and trust in them, but they fell under his gaze almost before they met it.

'Oh, Olive,' cried he, 'have mercy ! You do not drive me away ; but do not bless me by halves. "Or love me all in all, or love me not at all." Now that a glimpse of hope seems to be vouchsafed me, I feel as if I must have all or nothing. Can you love me, Olive ?' And as he spoke he held out his hand.

She saw his outstretched hand, and slowly laid hers in it. There was a moment's silence, and then she spoke, and her words came swiftly, and apparently without an effort. "'Can I love you ?'" you ask. I believe I have loved you all the time. I am quite sure I have never loved anyone else. It seems to me that you are the only one who can make my life perfect.'

Morrison's heart leaped for joy. Not only had she accepted him, but she was expressing the very thought which made one of the chief delights of his love for her. She alone could make his life a perfect whole. His love for her ran back as far as memory could reach. It had gladdened his boyhood, elevated his youth, and, please God, should elevate and sustain him as long as life lasted. 'My darling Olive!' he cried, tightly clasping her hand, which now as of old lay so contentedly in his, 'how shall I ever thank you enough? We always have loved each other, and we always will. Now we will be so happy. You did not look happy when I came to you.'

'I was miserable—very miserable. I was counting up my losses, and I seemed to have lost everything. I felt quite alone in the world.' A loving pressure of the hand told her that that grief was hers no longer. 'And I was vexed to find Austerfield so ugly.'

'It is not ugly!' he cried, in his turn indignant. 'It may not be what is called beautiful scenery, but it is just as beautiful as we were fitted for. To us the world was summed

up in this one field. It held all that we were capable of admiring. It contained a specimen in miniature of every kind of beauty in nature. It still seemed almost mountainous to us, and yet we had strength to climb it. Its beck had dangerous rapids, and deep and sullen pools, and was so broad that we had prudently to choose a safe spot for the bold venture of crossing it. Now we wonder where the difficulty could be. Then the wood was big enough for us to lose ourselves in. No, it's not ugly, but small. But, Olive, what made you not care for it just now, and what made me not care for it when I was here before, was that we were alone. We were never alone when we were here before: how happy we were together! We must never part more.'

'You are right,' said Olive. 'It was because I was alone. Once, when I was a child, I was just as miserable, and saw no beauty or pleasure in anything. It was that day when I thought you had left me to go to see some wild-beasts; but, after all, you had stayed at home for my sake. It was the last day we were together—do you remember?'

‘Do I remember? I remember everything—every single thing that happened that day.’

Olive blushed, for she too remembered that day, and how she had flung her arms round his neck and kissed him, and told him she should love him for ever and ever.

‘Don’t mind my remembering everything so well. My recollections are very delightful.’

‘We were happy children,’ said Olive. ‘The only sorrow we ever had was that our flowers would fade. We decorated a bower with garlands, and cried because they withered in a day. Oh, look at the sun! How beautiful it makes everything! It is like magic.’

Long rays of crimson were streaming across the field and glorifying all that they touched. She watched with admiring eyes, but truthfulness compelled her to add, ‘I dare say I should have thought that ugly too if you had not come.’

They watched the sun till it sank below the horizon; then Olive said, ‘I must go home. Aunt Lettice will be anxious if I don’t. You will come with me, won’t you? Oh, Willie, I am so happy!’

She was still happier when she entered the house, for Miss Lettice came to meet her with a letter in her hand—a letter with an Indian stamp. It was from her father:—

My child (wrote Sir Chesterfield), I have heard everything. You and your dear mother thought it kinder to keep the painful knowledge from me, but you were wrong. The fear that she had possibly been treated with injustice and cruelty has tormented me for years. That dread would never have left me, howsoever well you kept the secret. Now that my most painful fears are confirmed, and, besides that, I find that my dear wife is lost to me for ever, one thing only remains for me to do—to come home, and so long as life is left to me try to be a good father to you. God bless you, my own dear ill-used child. You will see me soon after you receive this. Try to forgive me and love me as your father. Full justice shall be done your dear mother's memory. I feel heart-broken when I think of all that she must have suffered. My darling, if you can forgive me for having treated you with such neglect, the remaining years of my life shall be spent in trying to make yours more happy. I long to be with you, for your mother's sake and for your own.

CHESTERFIELD BROOKE.

THE END.





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